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HAMMER AND SICKLE

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BY

MARK PATRICK, M.P. (TAVISTOCK)



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FOREWORD

THIS is a remarkable book.

There is no need for Mr. Patrick to excuse himself for adding one more to the many works on Soviet Russia produced in recent years, for he has his own contribution, and a valuable one, to make to our knowledge and understanding of the course of its development and the results, moral and material, which it has so far achieved. Such a book, placing Bolshevism in its historic setting, tracing it through its various phases and recording objectively its gains and losses, its failures and successes, would be certain in any case of a wide public. Recent events, in which the lives and liberties of Englishmen have been at stake, can only give it additional interest for English readers.

I have said that Mr. Patrick's study of Bolshevism is objective. That does not mean that he views its teachings with indifference nor that he has

nothing to say of the consequences which it may entail for us and the rest of the world; but before drawing his own conclusions he places the reader in a position to form his own judgment by a careful and discriminating account of the facts.

This book bears in its pages the evidence of long and careful study and personal acquaintance. It is not the rash outcome of a fortnight's personally-conducted tour. If others find it as interesting as I have done, they will be grateful to Mr. Patrick for enabling them to form a truer picture of the actual conditions of life in Soviet Russia. His survey confirms and deepens in my mind the sense of ugliness and gloom which other accounts have left upon me. How can life be tolerable where everyone to whom you talk—your colleague, housemate, table companion or chance acquaintance—may be an informer or a spy?

It may be thought that I am prejudiced since Mr. Patrick mentions that my effigy has been chosen as that of the typical English (and capitalist) villain, but this would be an error. Seldom has my vanity been so delicately flattered as on learning from a visitor that whilst in the Moscow shooting galleries he could have a shot at my

friend Mr. Churchill for a copek, it cost him three to have a shot at me. What more can an aspirant to fame desire?

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

58 *Rutland Gate,*
May 1st, 1933.

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HAMMER AND SICKLE

CHAPTER I

THE RUSSIANS

So many books have been written about Russia in the last two or three years that it may seem unnecessary to attempt yet another. But a good deal of what has been written does not really put, still less try to answer, those questions which most nearly concern this country. Careful summaries are published of Soviet industry and trade. But these assume a knowledge on the reader's part of the political theory and method which, in Russia, are, or were, so much more important than pure economics. Again, there are a number of eye-witness accounts of various phases of life under the Soviets, many of them interesting. But these, too, are apt to give detail without outline and to take it for granted that the reader knows what it is all about. Something that is neither a collection of personal impressions, nor yet an abstract treatise on Russian Communism, but a short account of the whole system general

enough to show the wood and not only the trees may be useful. Moreover, there seems to be a need for a great deal of "de-bunking."

Two questions about Russia really matter to us. Is she going to affect our own future directly? Is there anything that we should do well to learn from her and apply to our own system? On both these points there is an astonishing amount of "bunk" in circulation. In this country, and elsewhere for that matter, some see in the Russian export system a menace to the whole world's capitalist structure. Others, delighted by this supposed menace, think that we have only to copy Russia as nearly as we can in order to live happy ever afterwards. Between these two extremes there is to be found every shade of opinion, but, naturally enough, it is often merely opinion not based on fact.

Russia's official politico-economic principles should be more easily summarised than those of other states. Being newly evolved from a single theory, they should lack the subtlety and compromise which time and tradition have added to other systems. But the trouble is that principle and practice, in Russia, are very different things. Where expediency clashes with orthodoxy, expediency has it more and more often as time goes on, with the result that the most glaring contradictions arise. Russia, indeed, has actually practised what

amount to three or four different systems in the last fifteen years, while continuing throughout them to profess one and the same theory.

It is this which makes it hard to give any clear account of the Soviet Union in a reasonably short space. The best that one can do is to pick out a few of the main points in Bolshevik practice, past and present, and in describing them to try to show how they have gone to make up one more or less continuous whole. The present writer's only justification for making it is that he had some opportunity of looking at present-day Russia from an unusual angle; and that he has, or so he flatters himself, an average English outlook and experience, a thing, perhaps, of some value when dealing with the question which sooner or later may be of very direct concern to this country.

Communism, after all, is more than a remote issue best treated with an academic detachment. It is the state creed of a country with nearly a hundred and seventy million inhabitants and, above all, a creed which insists that its adherents should thrust it on the rest of humanity at whatever cost. Although it draws its vitality from Moscow, Communism can live on other than Russian soil. In Germany, as everyone knows, it has been till lately an important factor in organised politics and in spite of its present eclipse, it may be a still more important one in the future.

Every country has its Communist Party, and if our own is insignificant in point of numbers, it does not follow that it must remain so. Certainly it will not, if industrial depression continues for some years. Russia's future is a matter of considerable economic importance to us and to the rest of the world. Before long, moreover, it is only too likely that another Russian problem may arise of which public opinion generally is still quite unconscious. Russia is the most crudely and aggressively militaristic power of modern times, and in the next decade Europe may find that her growing armaments are yet another threat to stability and peace. Hysteria and exaggeration on the subject of Russia are foolish but an attitude of patronising detachment is hardly less so.

In what follows, statistics on the one hand and personal anecdotes on the other will be cut down to a minimum, and there will be no attempt to maintain the studied impartiality which marks some accounts of the Soviet system. Having come to very definite conclusions on some aspects of the system, I propose to put them down frankly. Right or wrong, at least they were not reached over-hurriedly.

The Englishman in Soviet Russia takes a long time to sort out contradictory impressions. In the first place, he is at a very great disadvantage

in making comparisons with his own experience, in that the Russian mentality and his own are poles apart. Almost everyone who comes to Moscow for the first time remarks, soon after his arrival, that it is an oriental town. Longer experience confirms the impression that it is not European, but it becomes more and more doubtful whether "oriental" is the right word. Whether or not the Russians have much in common with the Chinese I do not know. They certainly have not with the Arabic-speaking inhabitants of the Middle East, nor with the educated, or half-educated, Hindu. Rather than venture on doubtful analogies, it seems better to take it that the Russian mentality is Russian, and nothing else. It is, of course, a dangerous thing to try to generalise on the characteristics of a whole race, but some obvious traits in the Russian¹ character force themselves on one's notice.

In the first place, they seem to lack almost altogether the complex quality which we call common-sense. It is perhaps impossible to define common-sense, but we all know what it means, and one has only to sit through an act of Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*, for instance, or to read a page of the *Pravda*, to realise that, whatever it is, the Russians have not got it. A lack of it is evident

¹ By the word Russian is meant the Slavs of Great Russia, or wherever else in the Union they may happen to be.

in the ruling clique itself. For a long time the Communists strove to make the facts fit their theory. They found this impossible, but for a long time they persisted with their schemes with a ferocious logic. Latterly, they have swung over to the opposite extreme. They still profess the whole Marxian faith—the Dictatorship of the Proletariate and all the rest of it—but they allow, indeed order, that the whole spirit of Communism be flagrantly contradicted throughout the entire Russian economic structure, in the interests of their peculiar form of Big Business. It is all the very reverse of that facility for convenient—if illogical—compromise, on which we pride ourselves and which we attribute to our common-sense.

Another failing in present-day Russia is a devastating lack of a sense of humour. One suspects that this is less a racial characteristic than the more or less deliberate product of the Soviet régime. No Communist government in Russia, or elsewhere, could afford to allow its people to laugh much. It must work to maintain an atmosphere of fictitious strain and excitement, and those whom it cannot infect with it must be silenced by fear. What the Bolsheviks have aimed at, and hitherto achieved, is to encourage a gloomy priggishness which the outsider finds strangely oppressive. It is in evidence every-

where and all the time. It begins with the morning papers, which repeat themselves day after day at enormous length and with the most portentous seriousness, to a point at which it is difficult to resist a feeling that the leader-writers are engaged in a most successful attempt to parody themselves.

The note struck by the papers is sustained throughout the Russian official day, and there is seldom a spark of spontaneity or humour to relieve the monotony of revolutionary catchwords and trite sentiments endlessly repeated. One of the few items of comic relief is the flow of "stories" which circulate in Moscow at the expense of the Soviet régime and the conditions of living which it has produced. Some of them are perfectly proper, while others are not. Many of them are really witty. Just as in London the Stock Exchange is the reputed source of most of our anecdotes, so, in Moscow, they are often for some reason attributed to Radek, once prominent in the Bolshevik Councils, later under a cloud, but now, apparently, partly restored to favour again. But the foreigner not only finds it all tedious and ugly, so far as his personal taste is concerned, but he genuinely finds it hard to see how the Russians themselves can put up with it so patiently. Admittedly it is unreasonable to expect much common-sense, or humour, in a

revolution, even a revolution already fifteen years old. But the Communists will have to be increasingly careful not to bore their people too much.

The Russians show another characteristic which is hard to put into words, but which perhaps is the key to much of what has already happened and to what will happen in the coming decades. Possibly the nearest one can get to it is to say that the Russian is less individual than the Western European. The favourite official prefix in the Soviet Union is the word "mass". We have "mass-solidarity", "mass enthusiasm", "mass-culture", "mass" everything. The "BROAD MASSES" are mentioned half-a-dozen times in every edition of a newspaper, and in Russia the word seems to have rather more meaning than it would here.

With us, a "mass" is from most points of view the given number of individuals who compose it. In Russia, the "masses" are really a mass in consequence of their passivity and susceptibility to suggestion. It does not seem to be that the Russians are a highly disciplined people in the sense that the Germans are, or were, but rather that the individual does not feel the same impulse to assert himself and his opinions as does the average Western European or North American. He is more content to accept with resignation

what fate sends to him, though afterwards he will talk about it endlessly. His lack of initiative does not extend to his speech which, evidently, means more to him than it does to us.

Much of this fatalism, or whatever name one chooses to give it, must be due to the country's political history as well as to the wide-spread illiteracy which still persists. But one has the impression that it is also a tendency of the race itself. At any rate it is there, and it accounts for a good deal which, at first, bewilders the foreigner. To give two obvious examples, many outside observers in the time of the Tsars concluded that the Russians were a deeply and mystically religious people and credited them with a child-like loyalty to the "Little Father", the Tsar. Events have shown these conclusions to have been wrong and they have also suggested the explanation. The Orthodox Church was a powerful organisation which authoritatively demanded the people's allegiance, in fact, insisted on it under pain of severe penalties. The people obeyed, almost without question. Next, the Communists ordered them to abandon religion, and again they obeyed with hardly an attempt at active resistance. In the same way, the Empire demanded obedience and received it. Now, the Romanovs have not only gone, but they are forgotten, except when the Bolsheviks revive their

memory to pour ridicule on it; and it is the Soviets who receive the obedience which used to be given to the Imperial Government.

This suggests that Russia will do what she is told to do provided she is told firmly enough, and by someone with a show of force behind him. It follows also that Democracy is still a long way below the Russian horizon, as indeed Kerensky found to his cost in 1917; and it follows that in the Soviet system Russia has in many ways got the form of government she deserves. This is not to say it is the form of government she likes. If such a thing as a secret plebiscite were conceivable in Russia, perhaps anything up to three-quarters or more of the votes would be cast for an immediate and drastic change in the whole political and economic system. But no such thing is conceivable, and there is no present prospect of the Bolshevik oligarchy being overthrown by the initiative of the "masses".

One more Russian characteristic must be noted, and that is an extraordinary indifference to human suffering. It is not the sadism of a decadent race, nor does it seem to have anything in common with the cheerful callousness of, say, the Sudanese savage, but is something distinctively Russian. Nothing of it appears on the surface. Many Russians have a strong personal charm and even the despicable foreign Bourgeois in present-

day Moscow meets with personal courtesy from everyone, from the High Official in his office down to the young hands in a factory, or that was my own experience. But the taint of callousness is there and, as time goes on and the foreigner learns to see a little way beneath the surface, it thrusts itself more and more insistently on him.

There are records enough of cruelty throughout Russian history, but it remained for the Bolsheviks to set up Terror as one of the two main props of their system.

A Government which already has such items as the Cheka, the G.P.U. and the prison camps of the North to its account, and which could coolly decide, in the Year of Grace 1929, to change the system of land tenure by wiping out millions of its own peasants, is something to shudder at. There is, moreover, a calculated hypocrisy about the whole thing which is especially repellent. In their campaign against "class-enemies", carried on long after all objective necessity for it ceased the Bolsheviks have thought nothing of judicial murder whenever there was even a doubtful propaganda value in it. It is interesting to see the effect produced on such educated foreigners as come to Moscow on business, as diplomats, or for other reasons. Many of them arrive with an open mind or even an active sympathy for the Communist régime. But the majority of them, if

they remain long enough, develop an almost frenzied prejudice against everything Sovietic as the result of actual contact with Russian Communism as it is. The chief cause of this is not the "class-prejudice" by which Communists try to account for it, but that the inhumanity of the Bolshevik system becomes intolerable to the average civilized person as soon as he realises its extent.

It must be remembered that Bolshevism, through its political ancestry, owes its birth and its growth to the repression and persecution of the Empire. Under the Tsars, everything unorthodox, and particularly racial and religious minorities, were treated with the most stupid injustice. It was the resentment of the Intellectuals, the Jews, the Old Believers and many others which, directly and indirectly, led up to the October Revolution. There was then, unquestionably, a hope in most men's minds that oppression would cease and that something better would take its place. But when the opportunity came there was no effort to realise this hope or to set right the very wrong, intolerance, which had brought the Revolution about. A sheep-like passivity on the part of the crowd, coupled with the practical incompetence of the upper or the middle class which should have led it, handed Russia over to the Bolsheviks who proceeded to build up on the wreck of the Tsarist machine one of their own which in efficiency

and ruthlessness far surpasses anything that the old régime could organise. Whips gave place to scorpions; such ideas as peace and tolerance are relegated to an ever-receding future; and this in the name of a system with the most arrogant claims to a monopoly of social justice. Karl Marx assured the "workers" of Europe that "they had nothing to lose but their chains". But, in fact, there are more chains in Marxist Russia than anywhere else in the world, and most of them on the Russian workers themselves.

The Englishman does well to realise that Russian mentality and instincts are quite alien to his own. At least it is certain that it is a fundamental mistake to translate Russian events too literally into terms of our own experience, or to argue that because this or that side of Communism may succeed in Russia, it should therefore be adopted here. Russia and England are less alike than chalk and cheese.

CHAPTER II

PETER THE GREAT TO NICHOLAS II

MUCH of the Russia of 1933 is the direct product of past centuries, but to try to trace cause and effect down the years would be something far beyond the scope of this book; perhaps of any book. The main point is that just as Russian mentality is quite different from that of Western Europe, so Russian history has always been out of step with ours. Some outline, however short and rough, of past events, is a necessary background to any understanding of the Soviet Union of to-day.

Peter the Great found Russia still in the Asiatic dark ages. When he came to London, in the time of William and Mary, his suite followed him about dropping pearls and lice from their oriental robes. Before he died, he had contrived to drag a fraction of his countrymen nearly up to the level reached by contemporary Europe. It was an extraordinary *tour-de-force*. Peter's successors added a little polish to the veneer, but in essentials Russia really got no further. At a time when the rest of the world was moving on at a rate never before attained,

she remained, in many essentials, much where Peter had left her, that is to say somewhere near the level we had reached under Queen Elizabeth. It must not be forgotten that the serfs, whose status at some points touched that of actual slavery, were not emancipated until 1861.

Things remained relatively stable until the middle of the nineteenth century, but from the Crimean War onwards, the history of Russia becomes more and more the history of Tsarism defending itself against growing opposition. For over half a century the defence was successful, but the whole system was becoming more and more plainly an anachronism. To maintain itself, Tsarism was forced to a policy of increasing repression, and as repression was intensified, so the forces of revolt grew. These forces, therefore, had long been in existence before their final triumph in 1917. The Revolution was no sudden and unpredictable outburst, it was something long foreseen and accepted as inevitable; though no one knew when the storm might burst and very few guessed what form it would take.

Tsarism was not only politically unadapted, and unadaptable, to the twentieth century, but for generations it had shown itself economically impotent. It not only failed to develop Russia's

great potential assets in raw materials, but it was unable to exploit fully even those resources ready to its hand. Russian Agriculture was left in a state of mediæval crudity. Industry, in a modern sense, had hardly existed before the last decade of the nineteenth century. From then onwards it certainly grew quickly, mainly in the form of medium and large-scale industrial units. But these were largely financed, and often actually administered, by foreigners. The most glaring failure of Tsarism, however, was precisely in the sphere in which a military autocracy might be expected to show at least a tolerable degree of efficiency. The Empire could never win a war, by land or sea. The Crimea had shown that, lamentable as the organisation of the Western Powers then was, that of Russia was worse. A general realisation of her incompetence made a profound impression on Russia at the time and it led to some reform. It hastened, in particular, the liberation of the serfs, which otherwise might have been delayed still longer.

The next heavy blow to the Imperial system did not come for half a century, but it was one of the same kind. Russia's defeat by Japan rather surprised the world at large, and it stirred deeper feeling in Russia. It was, perhaps, really the signal for the close of the old order, though the actual end was delayed for years. In 1905, a

series of strikes led to large-scale riots which came near to reaching the status of a Revolution. Tsarism was frightened, and conceded some liberal reforms. But, as things quietened down, it took courage again and withdrew them. Except for some agrarian changes planned by Stolypin, who was murdered before they could take full effect, the seven years before 1914 were a time of reaction.

The inspiration of the long-drawn fight against the Imperial system had come, at first, from the Russian Intelligentsia. That ugly word has become hackneyed, but it had a precise application in Tsarist Russia. The Intelligentsia were a unique class, the product of unique conditions. They were an order of people typically, at times laughably, Russian, often of high intelligence and familiar with the most advanced thought of their times. But, partly by force of circumstance and partly from the lack of practical bent which marks the Russian character, they found themselves without an outlet for their energies. Having little chance to act except by throwing bombs or writing illicit pamphlets, the Intelligentsia talked.

Probably no one else has ever talked so fast and so long since the world began. But, if they often seem to have been more than a little ridiculous, it must be remembered that most of them

were oppressed by a sense of the injustice of things, and moved by a passionate desire to put them right. It was the efforts, in themselves ineffectual, of generations of the Intellectuals that made it possible at last for Stalin to sit in the Kremlin. Their fate has been pitiable. While it stood, Tsarism easily held them down. The Bolsheviks have succeeded the Tsars, and have dealt with those who are their political ancestors, to whom they owe their present inheritance, more savagely than even the Tsars did. It is no uncommon thing for a Russian who spent years in Tsarist prisons to have spent more years in the hands of the G.P.U.; or to live in exile to avoid a worse fate. Nothing can exceed the contempt of the Bolshevik for a mere radical or socialist.

The progressive or revolutionary agitation kept up by the Intellectuals for nearly a century, naturally changed its form and its objects as time went on. In its earliest days it had been a Liberal movement, vaguely inspired by the French Revolution. But it slowly became clear that ideas and tactics borrowed from the democratic liberalism of contemporary Europe were unsuited for the struggle against the mediæval reaction of the Empire. Impatience, or despair, shifted the centre of gravity of the progressive movement further and further to the left. Monstrous and

absurd political theories attracted fanatical adherents and programmes became more and more violent.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a whole class of professional revolutionaries was growing up. Nothing like it has been seen elsewhere. Men and women made revolution a career and spent half their lives in coming and going, in plotting outrages, in smuggling arms and ammunition, and in hiding from the Police; the other half they spent in prison or exile. But their immediate achievement was nothing. It was not until the social democrats learned from Karl Marx to concentrate on the new and rapidly growing class of factory hands, that any real threat to Tsarism arose. In 1905, the general disgust and disillusionment which followed the Japanese War, offered the revolutionaries a good opportunity. The comparatively new Bolshevik faction, under Lenin, took a leading part in getting the factory workers out on to the streets. At one moment, Moscow was nearly in their hands and the strike almost became a revolution. But a regiment of the Guard suppressed the outbreak in Moscow and Tsarism gained a respite of a dozen years.

The War, when it came, was a test far beyond the powers of the old régime which had generally found even minor campaigns too much for it.

Russia started in 1914 with certain advantages which, in other hands, might have been decisive. She had, as always, the strategic asset of immense distances and the absence of concentrated and vulnerable industrial areas. This may be a heavy handicap to Russia herself, but it is an insuperable obstacle to opposing commanders. It was no easier to reach a decision in 1916 than it was in 1812, or than it would be in 1940. She had, also, the advantage of great numbers.

As for morale, it seems a safe assumption that if the peasants who formed the Armies had had leadership and a State in which they could have continued to trust, they would have fought patiently on for as long, or longer, than any of their adversaries. But they had neither. The past had set a gulf between officers and men which widened as discipline weakened. The Russian officer, generally speaking, had neither earned the respect of his men by his efficiency, as the German officer often did, nor had he the fellow-feeling with them which our own improvised war-time system developed. The result was a sort of *jacquerie*, as soon as circumstances were favourable. Encouraged by the agitator, the soldier shot his officer in the back readily enough. The peasant conscript was not all to blame. His grandfather, in all likelihood, had been a

serf, and he himself probably felt, obscurely, that he was wiping out old wrongs.

What is true of the Russian officer applies in general, to the classes from which he came. There were brilliant exceptions. But, on the whole, the Russian landowner and the Russian bourgeois, each in their own way, extracted what they could from society and gave neither leadership nor service in return. The Tsarist system rather than the individual was responsible for this, but the fact remains that they could hardly have done less to avoid the disaster which had so long and so obviously threatened them.

After less than two years of war, it became plain that a breakdown was inevitable. The failure to provide munitions and equipment and the defeats of 1915 had shaken the Army. Cracks appeared, not only at the Front, but in the Rear, and the Tsarist structure quickly collapsed. It fell under its own weight, rather than was smashed by any planned and organised blow.

One of the immediate causes of the debacle was something almost irrelevant. An obscene adventurer named Gregory Rasputin gained an ascendancy over the neurotic Empress who, in turn, dominated the feeble Tsar Nicholas. Rasputin, thanks to the Empress, was able to

intervene in every department of government and even to try to dictate operations in the field. The administration grew more and more corrupt and mistrusted. More than one Minister was Rasputin's nominee and was suspected, not without reason, of working for a Russian defeat or, rather, a German victory. For Rasputin realised that his own future depended on the continuance of the autocracy in Russia. He regarded William the Second as a bulwark of the absolutist principle and mistrusted the Western Allies in this respect. Whatever might happen to Russia, therefore, he wanted to see the Kaiser victorious. With such an influence predominant, those who were striving patriotically to reorganise Russia's fighting power could do nothing. A feeling of disgust and betrayal spread from the rear to the front and it became evident that some drastic change was impending, a prospect which the majority welcomed.

Rasputin was murdered in December, 1916, but his death came too late. The harm had been done. The transport system had long been on the edge of a break-down and the shortage of food-supplies was becoming acute. The queues outside the Petrograd food-shops lengthened, and finally the crowd poured into the streets. After a short hesitation, the garrison joined the mob and the Revolution had succeeded. Casualties

were surprisingly few. There had been little of organisation or preparation. Neither the Army nor the Duma, nor any particular political party, had been responsible. The whole thing was largely haphazard. Three days later the Tsar quietly abdicated and was forgotten. The garrison offered its allegiance to the Duma, which improvised a Provisional Government.

The Government's programme was the classic one of leaving important issues, including the question of the land, to a Constituent Assembly to be elected on a wide franchise. In the meanwhile, it tried to carry on the War; in itself an impossible task in face of the growing disillusionment of the troops. Looking back, it is not difficult to see that the Provisional Government never had much prospect of succeeding. It had little support from public opinion, and it was not master in its own house. On the precedent of the great strikes of 1905-6, a Soviet (the word simply means Council), of representatives of the garrison, the factories, and so on, had been set up in Petrograd immediately after the Revolution. At first the Soviet was relatively moderate and left the control in the hands of the Government itself. But, as time went on, it became more extreme and more independent to the detriment of the Government's authority. The Government, moreover, had another and more fundamental

handicap. Russia had for so long been accustomed to an absolute rule that the democratic idea for which it hoped to stand was neither understood nor welcomed. All that the majority grasped about the new régime was that it was irresolute and incompetent.

It struggled on, more and more helpless to check a growing chaos at home and at the Front. So far as the Army was concerned, the Petrograd Soviet had broken what remained of discipline by instituting its famous Order No. 1, and by its encouragement of the Soldiers' Councils. Desertion grew, while the transport and supply situation went from bad to worse. In Petrograd, the Government came to consist virtually of Kerensky alone. It became a one-man show but a show that was too large for any one man. Since his fall, Kerensky has been held up to derision by Reds and Whites alike, but this contempt is by no means altogether merited. He might have known his own countrymen better than to suppose that they were yet capable of appreciating, still less of running, a democracy. But he did his best to hold Russia in the field against Germany, and to keep the machine of government running until the Constituent Assembly could meet. He even succeeded, by his own exertions, in persuading the Army to launch an offensive against the Austrians as late as the early

autumn of 1917. But this was the end of it. He himself had long been fighting a losing battle. His main asset was his eloquence, and opposed to him were blind forces against which patriotic speeches were of no avail.

CHAPTER III

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

IN April, 1917, the German General Staff had sent back to Russia a party of about thirty exiles of the Bolshevik Group, headed by Lenin, judging rightly that they would act as a powerful solvent of Russian resistance. Lenin reached Petrograd to find Stalin and the other rather mediocre Party leaders bewildered at a rapid turn of events not provided for in their revolutionary calculations. Stalin, in fact, had already compromised with the "bourgeois" revolution and was supporting the Provisional Government. But Lenin had no doubts or hesitations. He declared at once for opposition to the Government and a full Marxist programme, and he succeeded in carrying his at first reluctant and uncertain followers with him. Shortly afterwards Trotsky came back from Canada and threw in his lot with Lenin, whom he had often opposed in the past. The Bolsheviks opened a campaign of intensive agitation, which at once began to take effect.

The Party itself was at first insignificant in point of numbers and never attained, or tried to

attain, to anything like a popular majority. One of their main principles was, and is, to remain an active and highly organised and disciplined minority. In the elections for the Constituent Assembly they only won about an hundred and seventy seats out of seven hundred odd. Another Marxist party, the Social Revolutionaries, held more than twice as many. But the Bolsheviks had a strong hand to play. While Kerensky was exhorting the peasants in the Armies to go on fighting and to leave the land question to the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviks told them to leave the trenches and go and take the land for themselves. It is not surprising that the latter arguments should have prevailed with the Army. So far as Petrograd was concerned, the Bolsheviks had the advantage of a definite programme. At a time when everyone else was confused and uncertain, Lenin knew what he wanted and was hampered by no scruple in his fight to get it. His programme, moreover, was the most extreme of those current, and though the crowd had no conception of its ultimate implications, its leading theme, an attack on the rich for the benefit of the poor, naturally made a strong appeal at such a time. But the winning card held by the Bolsheviks was the leadership of Lenin who, with the doubtful exception of Trotsky, was by far the ablest figure on the contemporary stage.

When the Bolsheviks launched their *coup* early in November, 1917 (it was still October according to the old calendar), they met with little resistance. They had the backing of most of the Petrograd garrison, and there was hardly more opposition than there had been in the preceding spring. Once again, the mastery of Russia went by default. People hardly took the Bolsheviks seriously at first, and they themselves were by no means sure that they could hang on for more than a matter of weeks. But they did hang on, and without undue difficulty. Organised resistance did not develop for months. When it did develop the Bolsheviks faced a risk, at times acute, of military defeat for the best part of two years. In the Moscow Revolutionary Museum hangs a large-scale map showing the position of the armies when the Reds were in their greatest straits in 1919. It is a striking exhibit. Almost the whole of the vast area of Russia was in the hands of various White commanders and only an insignificant island of territory, which luckily for them included Petrograd as well as Moscow, was left to the Soviets. But the Whites showed little political talent and no cohesion among themselves. Their generals were beaten separately and their armies melted away. After a sporadic war that lasted in all nearly three years, and which in proportion to the numbers engaged perhaps bred

more cruelty on both sides than any in modern history, the Soviets were left in possession of the whole country, less Poland and the small border States which had already been detached.

The Civil War was the salvation of the Bolsheviks. It generated the atmosphere of crisis and tension which they find most favourable to them, and which they have not ceased to try to keep alive artificially to this day. It offered a convenient justification for the Terror, and enabled them to put to death hundreds of thousands of those whom they regarded as potential opponents, without exciting too much active resentment and disgust. The presence of a few foreign troops and the sale to the Whites of some surplus arms and ammunition—the Bolsheviks still take every opportunity of referring to this period as “The Intervention”—touched a chord of nationalism which was an invaluable asset to them at the time and of which they have made the most ever since.

Finally, the Civil War taught them a great deal. They began it as a small group with little but enthusiasm to rely on. But they finished it as an administration with experience gained in a hard school. That they did emerge at all they owe largely to two men; to Lenin himself, and to Trotsky, who seems to have shown a prodigious energy coupled with a talent for organisation.

As it was, the Bolshevik hold on Russia was assured before the end of 1920.

Since then, the power of the Communists has been absolute, but their exercise of it has been directed to astonishingly varying ends. First came the period of War Communism, as the Bolsheviks call it, which began with their successful coup in October 1917, and which lasted through the Civil War. It was succeeded early in 1921 by the NEP, (i.e., New Economic Policy. The initial letters of the words are the same in Russian as in English). This phase was in turn succeeded by another, and a quite distinct, one which began on the death of Lenin or, more accurately, when Stalin had disposed of rival claimants to the Succession, some two or three years later. This third phase might be summed up in the words, "The Plan, The Whole Plan, and Nothing but The Plan", and it persisted until quite lately. It did not come to a definite and clear-cut end, but its termination was really marked by a notable speech delivered by Stalin in June, 1931, often referred to as the "Six Points".

With this speech began the fourth and latest phase, in some ways the most significant of all of them. Stalin's speech, although he was careful to deny that it meant anything of the sort, implied no less than a denial of the original

Communist faith and a recognition of the bankruptcy of the principles on which the Bolsheviks had appealed to the Russian people as well as to the outside world, and on which they had justified innumerable acts otherwise unjustifiable. It may be that this last phase, when in the future it comes to be viewed in perspective, may appear as the last in the series of changes which have succeeded each other since the October Revolution, and indeed the end of that Revolution in any true sense.

Within a few weeks of their *coup d'état*, the Bolsheviks started to put Marxist theory into practice and War Communism began. One of their first actions was to dismiss the Constituent Assembly. They were in the minority, and, in any case, the Assembly was a democratically elected body and thus incompatible with their theory of Class Dictatorship. Soon after, the Banks were seized. Houses were communised and private property in general declared to be nationalised. The workmen took over and attempted to run a number of factories, the former owners or managers in some cases being forced to remain on to direct them. The State attempted to manufacture and to trade directly, without intermediate organisations. The currency was wildly inflated.

The Bolsheviks, in short, tried to introduce

pure Communism at one sweep. Having destroyed the currency they proposed, in effect, to abolish money and to substitute for it what would have amounted to an issue of tickets or coupons, obtainable only in exchange for work or services. "He who does not work shall not eat" was their text, and they hoped to supply even the most personal requirements of individuals on the basis of the work he or she performed. At the same time, they made a beginning with their "federal" policy, which may be summed up as the grant of as much cultural independence, and as much of the shadow of autonomy as is consistent with the retention of the substance of real control at the centre.

As might have been expected, War Communism proved economically disastrous. So far from being able to supply the popular need for, say, tooth-brushes, the Soviets failed to arrange a food supply. The Civil War and the Terror continued. The currency lost all value and there was nothing to take its place. Industrial production fell to less than a fifth of its pre-war volume. Transport was paralysed and, most serious of all, an economic and political gulf opened between the towns and the country which has not been closed even now.

It was no longer possible to deny that Communism, in the crude form that it had been attempted,

had failed. Something had to be done, and, early in 1921, Lenin took the decisive step of introducing the New Economic Policy. This was to abandon the State's monopoly of trade and industry and again to legalise private enterprise, subject to handicaps and restrictions. At the same time, the State was to remain in occupation of the "Commanding Heights of Communism", notably the monopoly of foreign trade. The official defence of this step backwards seems to have been that it was no more than a temporary expedient, designed to relieve the crisis brought on Russia by external factors.

Such was the inherent advantage of State-owned industry and commerce, it was argued, that it would, of its own force, drive private enterprise from the field in due course. Whether these arguments were meant as a serious forecast, or merely as an excuse, they proved right in only one respect. The NEP certainly did relieve the crisis. Trade, in private hands, enjoyed a sort of boom, and a new class of traders, many of them Jews, sprang up and flourished. These Nepmen, as they were called, excited the hatred and contempt of the Communists, but their activities were unquestionably of assistance to the Community, as well as profitable to themselves. In spite of a disastrous famine in the South, which starved to death many hundreds of thousands

of peasants, conditions slowly improved until, by 1925 or '26, they had become tolerable in comparison with those of 1920 or, for that matter, with those of the present day.

For the rest, NEP belied the official forecast. It was not private enterprise but the "Socialised Sector" of Russian economics which found the competition too hot. The Communists, naturally reluctant to recognise that an essential element in their scheme had been miscalculated, in the end felt compelled to do by force what they could not do by economic competition. Finally, NEP was abolished and the Nepman, as such, wiped out; but this did not happen for several years.

It is useless to wonder what was really in Lenin's mind when he led the retreat to the NEP in 1921; whether, that is to say, he really looked on NEP as a passing episode or whether he had come secretly to doubt the future of pure Communism and, knowing he was the only man strong enough to break with his own doctrine, had resolved to swing the Revolution permanently towards a compromise. Only events could have answered these questions; but they were never answered. In 1923, Lenin had a stroke, and after lingering for months, more or less incapacitated, he died at the beginning of 1924, still comparatively young.

By any standard, he was a remarkable man.

He was the son of a retired civil servant, or what corresponds to it, who had been raised to the minor nobility and lived on a small estate. An elder brother of Lenin had been executed for complicity in an attempt on the Tsar. Report, or legend, has it that Lenin was deeply attached to this brother and was shocked and embittered by his death. However this may be, either circumstance, or his own temperament, or both, drove him to the extreme Left. He became one of the singular class of professional Revolutionaries peculiar to pre-war Russia, and like the rest of them, spent most of his time either in prison, or in hiding; or else in exile abroad.

Lenin, in fact, passed a good part of his life in Geneva. His active career, up till the last five years of it, was necessarily spent in agitation and controversy, at which he excelled. As will be noted later, it was he who founded the Bolshevik Group in 1903, and kept it together till 1917. But he was capable of more than sarcasm in conference halls and effective articles in revolutionary broadsheets. He was, unquestionably, a brave and determined man. He played a chief part in the revolutionary strikes of 1905, which were not very far from attaining their object, and it was he who decided on and directed the *coup* of October and inspired the remarkable effort exerted by the Bolsheviks for the next three or four years.

He must bear the responsibility for the mass-murders which marked the time of the Civil War, and he is not relieved of it by the fact that the record of the White Armies was no better than that of the Red. As a Russian, and a fanatic at that, he probably was quite unmoved by the wholesale bloodshed. But where he differed from most Russians, and most fanatics, was in having a shrewd sense of what was practical politics and what was not. His most obvious miscalculation was his belief, on which he based his current policy from 1917 onwards, that a proletarian revolution would sweep the world as the result of the war, not in some vague future, but at once.

This was not his only profound mistake, and his whole career suggests less the great world-figure which some people wish to see in him, than an obstinate fighter and a man of action able to take full advantage of great opportunity when it came to him. He kept an extraordinary hold over his followers while he lived. Since his death, he has become a legendary Hero. This is in great part due to the elaborate propaganda of his successors, who find it invaluable to have a Prophet behind whose name they can shelter at moments of difficulty; but it is also due, in part, to the outstanding personality of Lenin himself.

Even before his death, an obscure struggle for the succession to the supreme power had begun.

It is impossible for the foreigner, or indeed for anyone outside a small inner ring, to learn the details of the intrigues and rivalries that went on and, for that matter still go on, behind closed doors in the Kremlin. But this does not greatly matter since the broad outline is plain for all to see. During Lenin's last illness, it was already evident that the issue must lie between two men, Trotsky and Stalin.

Trotsky is a Jew, and a life-long revolutionary. He has a gift of eloquence, and a fluent and effective pen; and he evidently possesses great energy and powers of organisation. He did not join the Bolshevik Group till 1917, but from then onwards rendered them conspicuous service. The Bolsheviks might well have lost the Civil War without him. In spite of his politics, he is an individualist, the stuff of which successful dictators are made. With these qualities he not unnaturally showed some weakness for the limelight, and was altogether a somewhat inconvenient figure in the "Workers' Republic" where the conventional attitude for a public man is a sort of self-conscious anonymity.

Stalin is a very different man. He does not approach Trotsky in brilliance. But he seems to have few weaknesses. He is a Georgian (Stalin, like Lenin, is only an alias dating from the days when the revolutionaries were constantly in hiding

from the Tsarist police), the son of a village cobbler. He was intended for the Church and was educated at a Catholic seminary. But before he was twenty, he became a convert to revolutionary ideas, and expulsion from the seminary followed. From then onwards he led the hunted life of the agitator under the Tsars. He was among the most energetic and persistent of them, and suffered accordingly. He is said to have spent half his youth and manhood before 1917 in prison or exile, and to have escaped from Siberia twice. The March revolution set him free and he returned to Petrograd where he led the Bolshevik Group until Lenin came back. From then onwards he took a growing part in Bolshevik affairs, and it is curious that he and Trotsky appear to have had more than one personal clash, long before their final struggle.

Stalin is reputed to be unwilling, or unable, to enter into the long abstract discussions on any and every question which are so dear to many Russian hearts. He prefers, according to common report, to quote some text from Marx or Lenin on the point at issue, and to leave it at that. But if he lacks imagination and originality, he can well afford to, seeing that he is the most experienced and powerful politician, in the American sense, in the Soviet Union. He has concentrated on two things; organising the Party machine and

consolidating his own hold on it. In both, he has been conspicuously successful. The Party dominates Russia and Stalin dominates the Party. He has developed a peculiar political technique in the process.

Although hundreds of thousands of his portraits hang beside those of Marx and Lenin, in innumerable public places and private dwellings throughout Russia, and although his pronouncements on current topics are quoted and printed *ad infinitum*, few ever see him in the flesh. He lives in a mysterious seclusion somewhere in the Kremlin, and makes only rare public appearances, on such occasions as a May-Day Review, or a Party Congress. He holds neither any important Governmental position, nor official rank. He is merely Secretary-General of the Party. But, by his long-established control of the machine and its patronage, he has secured himself an organised backing on the foundation of which he exerts a Dictatorship which is probably no less autocratic than that of Mussolini. Stalin's whole career, before 1917 and since, suggests that he is a man of exceptional determination and tenacity. He must be a very shrewd judge of his countrymen. But he cannot be the "Man of Steel," the single-minded Reformer of human society, for which credulous visitors from the outside world seem often to mistake him. His

talents lie in other and much less romantic directions.

Lenin's grasp of affairs was loosened by his last illness and it was not long before Stalin began to oppose his wishes. Trotsky, on the other hand, backed up his leader. Lenin, realising perhaps that he could not recover, appears to have felt anxiety as to the future, foreseeing the dangers of a split in the Communist Party, one faction behind Trotsky and the other with Stalin. At all events, he drafted a sort of political testament in which he recited the dangers which threatened and, incidentally, described Stalin as "harsh and disloyal." But this document did not come to light until long afterwards; Lenin died, and the fight was on.

Both Stalin and Trotsky took up positions diametrically opposite to those which the outsider might have guessed most likely. One might have imagined that Trotsky, the successful military organiser, would have advocated a relatively moderate policy and devoted himself to developing a personal following. On the contrary, he stood for the theory of "perpetual revolution"—a constant move towards the Left; or at any rate a constant move for a form of Communism less diluted than the NEP, including a development of long-term planning such as later was embodied in the Five Year Plan; and particu-

larly for a drastic policy towards the individualist peasants.

One might have supposed, again, that Stalin, the hard-bitten revolutionary whose fortunes were bound up with the Communists as a Party, would have represented the pure Communist doctrine in an extreme form. But, in fact, he seems to have drawn considerable support from those inclined to moderation, including some whom he afterwards broke for showing too much of it.

The contest lasted for about three years. Trotsky had the advantage of his greater intelligence, and he had a wide, though unorganised, personal following. Stalin never relaxed his hold on the Party Machine. This ensured him a monopoly of Press and political propaganda to which Trotsky could make no reply, and, more important, he kept control of the G.P.U. Together, these assets were decisive. Trotsky was successively removed from his post, sent to Asiatic Russia, and finally exiled to Turkey, where he remains.

But the most unexpected part of the story is its sequel. No sooner was the coast clear than Stalin executed a *volte-face* and himself adopted the essential parts of Trotsky's programme, namely, an end to NEP, more State Planning, and the forced collectivisation of Agriculture. At the same time, he conciliated Trotsky's supporters, scores of thousands of whom had been suppressed during

the struggle, by re-employing them. Thus Trotsky was left without a Platform, and without a Party. The whole thing was certainly the most adroit politics; but it has a much stronger suggestion of a municipal election in Chicago, than of a Dictatorship of the Revolutionary Proletariate.

With Stalin solidly in power, a third phase of the Revolution began. The two earlier phases naturally designate themselves as War Communism, and the NEP, respectively. The third phase might conveniently be called the "Plan Period". First, NEP was "liquidated", to use a common Soviet expression, and so were the Nepmen. Those of them who contrived to survive the wholesale confiscation, under the guise of special taxation, were easily accounted for by the G.P.U. In 1930, the process was complete. A small percentage of trade and industry continued, and of course still continues, to be shown in official returns as being in private hands. But this percentage represents only minor village industry, small-scale retail trade, and the somewhat scanty and uncertain supply of foodstuffs brought by still "uncollectivised" peasants to the "free markets" of Moscow and other towns, when and where these "free markets" are tolerated. The official policy towards them seemed to fluctuate surprisingly. At times, apparently encouraged, at others they were suppressed.

It must be noted that the Agricultural Decrees issued in the summer of 1932, designed to increase the share of private enterprise in the country's total trade turnover, fall outside what I have called the "Plan Period" and belong, rather, to the succeeding and present phase. By the end of 1930, when the Plan Period was at its height, virtually the whole of Russia's economic activity and actually the whole of medium and large-scale trade and industry, was in the hands of the State; or in those of the Co-operatives which, for practical purposes, is the same thing.

The main features of the "Plan Period" were The Five Year Plan itself, and the Collectivisation of Agriculture. These two vast undertakings may represent the climax of the Communist Revolution, at least in anything like its original form. It is hard to say precisely when the high-water mark of this phase was reached, but the foreigner who revisited Russia in 1932 could not fail to notice that the tide had turned, and, in fact, had already ebbed some considerable way.

I have already suggested that Stalin's speech on June 23rd, 1931, could conveniently be taken as marking the turning-point. Among other points in the same general sense, the main theme of the speech was an insistence on greater "Personal Responsibility" in industry and, above all, on the necessity for unequal rewards to individuals,

in accordance with the unequal value of the work done. It implied that an attempt to obtain greater efficiency was essential to the Five Year Plan, and that this must take precedence of everything else, not excepting the fundamental Communist conception that every individual should be made to serve the State to the best of his ability, in return for which the State should assign to him a share of the common assets of the community, in accordance with his needs. But, apart from theory, the practical effects of the newly-recognised policy seem likely to be far-reaching. By setting up differentiated standards of living, it opens wide the door to the formation of new classes; and these, if there is any force in historical precedent, will tend to perpetuate themselves. It has deprived the Class War of its last shred of meaning or justification, and it has reduced the doctrine of the Dictatorship of the Proletariate, always unreal, to an open farce.

The fourth and latest phase of the Revolution is thus now about two years old. From the economic point of view, it represents a shift away from pure Communism, towards the Right. But the extension of the piece-rate system and the concessions offered to the collectivised peasants in the shape of greater liberty for private trade, seem to have come too late. At any rate, they have not been effective. 1932, and with it the

first Five Year Plan, ended badly. Industry was in a profoundly unsatisfactory state; agriculture in chaos; the weight of short-term external debt threatened a crisis; and, above all, disillusionment at home was becoming general. As it has done before when in difficulties, the Kremlin evidently decided to try the effect of Terror. Within a few weeks of the end of the Plan, which was to have brought in the Millennium, arrests and executions on the Collective Farms had begun, factory managers were empowered by decree to deprive workmen of their Bread Cards, overcrowding in the towns was being dealt with by wholesale evictions, and finally the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial was staged.

The course of the October Revolution has thus been a zigzag from Left to Right and back again; from War Communism to the NEP; from the NEP to the Plan; and from the Plan to the present phase, which itself is a blend of non-Communist economic tendencies and Communist Terror. Which way Russia will turn next one cannot even guess.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTY

THE "All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)", the title it adopted in 1921, derives its official doctrines from Karl Marx and its organisation from Lenin. Marx has had an influence on all the Socialisms of Europe, but perhaps nowhere to the same degree as in Russia. When the Russian Revolutionaries discovered him they found in him just what they had needed; a quasi-scientific justification of their conviction that violent social changes were necessary and inevitable, a conviction they had long felt but which had, before, tended to lack logic or coherence.

In these circumstances, the Social Democrats, the political parents of the Bolsheviks, swallowed Marx whole, and in the Russia of 1933, his authority remains nominally unquestioned. Indeed, he has acquired something of the status of a Prophet; and he is the Law as well, or most of it. His works have been commented on and expounded by good Communists, very much in the manner of Moslem theologians and the Koran. Hundreds of thousands of his portraits hang any-

where and everywhere throughout the Soviet Union.

Lenin himself claimed to be, first and foremost, an exponent of Marxism, and when Stalin, in 1931, enunciated his "Six Points", he was careful to defend himself from an anticipated charge of unorthodoxy by citing Marx as his chief authority. The whole Soviet system was originally an attempt to put Marxist theories into practice. Many of them have not, in fact, been realised in Russia for the reason that they are unrealisable, and now the Revolution seems steadily drifting away from what remains of them towards something which, whatever else it may be, will not be Marxian. Nevertheless, Karl Marx's official prestige is unaffected.

Karl Marx was an original economist, but he suffered from the shortcomings of his time. He belonged to that happy Victorian epoch when the Learned knew everything; or what they did not actually know, they were shortly going to find out. In those days, what could not be explained materially and mechanically really could hardly be said to exist. Nowadays, science itself has shown how far our senses mislead us. Matter has gone, dissolved into infinitesimal points of energy, in a perhaps non-existent ether. Einstein has upset our confident instincts about Space and, worse still, there now seems to be a doubt

whether physical things are really founded at all upon Cause and Effect; or only upon Chance, limited by a sort of grand Law of Averages. In 1933, we have every excuse for a feeling of confusion and diffidence.

But Karl Marx, like some of his contemporaries, seems to have been troubled by no such weak uncertainties. He was satisfied that his Dialectic Materialism gave him the key to the truth of things. As a thorough-going materialist, he reckoned without the immaterial so far as he could, and thus arrived at an interpretation of the past and a forecast of the future which, in some ways, was so over-simplified as to be unreal to the point of absurdity. He sought to explain human history, for example, as the product of a latent, or actual, economic struggle between different classes. No one would attempt to deny that successive civilisations have given birth to classes whose interests have been opposed economically. But to take this as a summary and explanation of the whole infinitely complex and changing fabric of human affairs; and to dismiss as secondary all the factors of evolution, race, geography, religion, politics, and the rest, is Mid-Victorian, to say the least of it.

But what is of interest in 1933 is not the opinions of Karl Marx himself, but those of his theories which the Russians have either put into

practice, or tried to put into practice, or discarded, as the case may be. So far as the outsider can judge of it, the Bolshevik's general programme is, or was, somewhat as follows: First, the fight to establish Communism in Russia, at the same time a period of "Restoration". Next, the stage of Socialist construction, marked by the disappearance of classes, and the building up of Russia's economic and financial structure on Socialist lines. During this phase, Russia must "catch up and surpass" (a very favourite phrase) the Capitalist world which, incidentally, must be persuaded or forced to embrace Communism. This second stage is recognised to need a long, but indefinite, time for its full achievement.

At last, it must give place to the era of perfected Communism. Theoretical Communism, it must be noted, unlike some other forms of socialism, rejects the idea of a powerful and centralised State. It looks forward to an eventual world-union of Socialist republics, in which there shall be as much local and sectional (but *not* individual and personal), autonomy, as possible. Certain services, as for instance the Posts, would necessarily remain centralised. But for the rest, there is to be a sort of Red Arcadia, without distinction of race or class, in which every individual shall serve the Community according to his or her powers, with the minimum of interference from central authority, and be

rewarded according to his or her needs from the Community's common stock of possessions.

No one would find much to criticise in this ideal. All civilisation is striving to move in this same direction, or towards something not very different. But when it comes to actual fact, Soviet Russia, in spite of the unrelenting efforts of the Bolsheviks, is drawing no nearer to it. On the contrary, before the second phase, that of Socialist Construction, has more than begun, forces have developed which are pulling her in a direction away from Socialism, not to say Communism, altogether.

But, to return to Russo-Marxist theory, one of the leading doctrines of the Bolsheviks has been the Dictatorship of the Proletariate. It is based on the idea that there is only one class in the community which merits consideration, and that is the Proletariate (and, with some qualifications, the Peasants). Since these are the actual producers, physically speaking, it follows, so the argument runs, that all other classes are "parasitic" upon them. The Proletariate, therefore, would fare better without the personnel of bourgeois government, the capitalists, the non-proletarian intellectuals, and the rest, who merely combine to "exploit" the "workers".

This may seem a rather incomplete basis on which to found a whole political structure. But

the working out of the idea is stranger still. In translating his axiom into political practice, the orthodox Bolshevik rejects the idea of democracy, even though it be a democracy based upon universal suffrage and the abolition of all privilege. Even that, says the Bolshevik, is no good to us. The Proletariate, he argues, even though it may have an overwhelming preponderance of votes, never gets justice in a democracy. The Bourgeoisie, with its superior education and experience, and its financial pull, will always succeed in deceiving and betraying it. Even if the Proletariate does succeed in evading the bourgeois net, there remains the State, necessarily a powerful organisation in any democracy. Whenever necessity arises, the State will certainly intervene and deprive the Proletariate of justice by force.

The "Workers", in short, in spite of their superiority in numbers, are too weak to hold their own against other classes in a democracy, and some other scheme must be devised for them. The solution is the "Dictatorship of the Proletariate". Since the Proletariate cannot fend for itself against other classes, other classes must be reduced to impotence for its benefit, and ultimately eliminated altogether. But it is not to be expected that those classes would willingly assent to being suppressed. Force is inevitable, and hence the necessity for the "Class War".

It is hard to believe that a sort of tragic *reductio ad absurdum* like this should still form, in name at least, the basis of a whole political system; and the system of the largest political unit in the world at that. But so it is. The Dictatorship of the Proletariate and the Class War have been, and still are, the chief political stock-in-trade of the Bolsheviks, and the application of the two ideas has probably affected almost every individual, to his advantage or disadvantage, throughout the more civilised areas of the Soviet Union.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariate, not unnaturally, is unrealisable in practice. The moving spirits of the Revolution probably never hoped to impart any great reality to the phrase. At any rate, there is no such intention now. But the idea is of first-rate propaganda value and, when enunciated often enough, as it certainly is, it helps to soothe and appease the Proletariate itself when they find conditions particularly trying.

The Class War, on the other hand, was originally very much a reality. At the time of the Civil Wars, the Bolsheviks were hard pressed. By Civilised standards the excesses then committed cannot be justified, though they are to be explained by the uncivilised, even savage, qualities that persist in the Russian nature. But the Soviets undoubtedly had to defend themselves, or be

destroyed, for the first three or four years of their rule. From about 1921 onwards, however, the danger was over and they would have done better, as things have turned out, to have dropped persecution and devoted all their attention to reconstruction and development. But they did not, having found the Class War and kindred ideas very valuable items in their scheme of propaganda.

It is amusing to reflect that the Bolshevik Party was born in South Kensington. The "Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party" dated from the 'eighties. Its name, nowadays, has a suggestion of mildness. But it was, as a matter of fact, a Marxist Party as extreme in its views as most of the other contemporary Russian groups, though inferior in numbers and influence to at least one of them. As did many of the most active Russian revolutionaries of that time, a number of the leading Social Democrats of necessity lived abroad.

In 1903, the Party were to have held a Conference in Brussels, but the Belgian Police made matters too hot for them, and the conference was transferred to London. Here, a sharp division of opinion took place on what was, apparently, a point of organisation, but which proved, as things turned out, to be an issue of the first importance. One faction wished to make admission to the Party an easy matter; they preferred a

large and comparatively loose organisation. The other faction was led by Lenin, who believed in a party small in numbers, to which admission should be difficult and which should be subject to firm discipline and a centralised control. Lenin's faction won, by a very small majority, and the Social-Democrats thereupon split into two wings, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks ("Majority Section" and "Minority Section", with reference to the vote at the London meeting). Broadly speaking, the division was into a Right and a Left.

The more moderate Mensheviks hoped to introduce the principles of Karl Marx by consent. Lenin and his Bolsheviks saw, from the first, that this was an impossibility and proposed to do it by force. Lenin, moreover, never departed from his conception of a small Party, subject to strong discipline. By an incredible chain of chance, this exiled leader of a single group within one of several revolutionary organisations, lived to see all his plans realised. He *did* impose Marxism on Russia by force and he was enabled to do it precisely by the unity and discipline of a comparatively small following, on which he had insisted.

The Bolsheviks have never been anything but a small minority. Even now, the entire active Communist apparatus can hardly represent five

per cent of the population. It consists of the Octobrists and the Pioneers, who correspond, roughly, in age and organisation, to our Boy Scouts, and whose ages run from about eight to sixteen; of the Komsomol—the League of Communist Youth—an organisation without any close parallel elsewhere which plays an unexpectedly important part in Soviet Russia (a boy or girl is eligible for the Komsomol from fifteen to twenty-three); and, finally, of the Communist Party proper. The total membership of the Party itself is now over three million. This figure, it may be noted, represents a large increase in the last year or so, the total in 1929 having been given as less than a million and three-quarters. I have never seen published the figures for the Komsomol, but its membership probably exceeds five millions. The Pioneers are, of course, still children, and a considerable part of the Komsomol is too young to play any great part in affairs, except as a chorus. Again, a certain proportion of the Party itself is inactive, for one reason or another. It seems safe, therefore, to put the effective Communist element at much less than eight millions. The population of the Union is nearly one hundred and seventy millions. It is thus a very short tail that so decisively wags the whole dog.

There are no very severe restrictions upon entry into the Pioneers. But when it comes to

the Komsomol, the Bolshevik theory of Class begins to operate. There may be a considerable number of young people of non-proletarian origin who have been admitted for one reason or another, but generally speaking, it has been intended as a proletarian organisation. In Russia, just as has been the case elsewhere, Youth has played a more important part in affairs in these times of high political tension than it would do in more normal and static periods, and, as has happened in other countries in parallel circumstances, among young Russians there seems to be a good deal of ignorance and narrowness of outlook; impatience of older people and intolerance of their ideas; and of rather ill-founded self-esteem and self-assurance.

But the young Russian himself is hardly to blame for these defects. He is the deliberate and artificial creation of the Soviet system, which sets out to isolate, so far as it can, the young from all influences but its own, and to pour into the vacuum thus created an unending stream of suggestion in favour of its own doctrines. The Komsomol represents the successes of this method. The failures—those young people who have not proved amenable enough to it, for one reason or another—are, of course, unlikely to be members of the organisation. Of what remains of genuine belief in and enthusiasm for the Revolu-

tion, a high proportion is to be found among the Young Communists. Older and more experienced people may become discouraged and cynical. But, so far as the outsider can judge, there is as yet little of disillusionment among the members of the Komsomol. This is not to say that they are all convinced and conscientious Communists. Tens—or hundreds—of thousands of them must join and remain in the organisation for what they can get out of it. But, as a generalisation, it seems safe to say that while faith in the Revolution has weakened elsewhere, often to vanishing point, there is still to be found zeal and conviction in the Komsomol.

The Komsomol, therefore, is of the utmost value to the ruling faction, and they make full use of it. Like the Members of the Party itself, the Young Communists are supposed to go wherever they are sent, on whatever work they are selected for. There is often an element of compulsion in these missions, but still they are carried out. Young Communists, for instance, played a large part in the campaign of 1929-'30 for the collectivisation of agriculture and the liquidation of the Kulak. As the Five Year Plan proceeds, the whole industrial scheme depends more and more on the intensive activity of the "Shock Brigades".

The mission of these workmen, who are to be found all over the Union, is to work at the highest

possible pressure and with all the efficiency they can, in order to set the pace for the rest. They are by no means all young Communists or Party men. There are not enough of these to go round. But the Party element is represented and is expected to inspire and direct the rest. In this, and in a dozen other voluntary services, the Young Communist still serves the Soviet State with enthusiasm, and the State would be hard put to it without him.

The Party proper draws its membership mainly from the industrial proletariat. Even allowing for a large increase in the last year or two, probably less than ten per cent are connected with the land. Beside the Workers and Peasants (workers and peasants, that is to say, by origin, since in the course of the Revolution many of them have become officials, factory managers, etc.), there is another small but very influential element, the Old Bolsheviks, those who joined the Party before 1917. A few of these are not of proletarian origin, but formerly of the Old Intelligentsia. Many of the surviving Old Bolsheviks, whether because of ability and experience, or because of an unconscious feeling of conservatism in the Party generally, still hold important posts in the State in spite of the fact that some have been involved either in the "Right Divergence," or in Trotsky's Heresy. In fact, of the Old Guard,

only Trotsky himself has been drastically and apparently, permanently eliminated.

Election to the Party is very much on the basis of Class. The factory hand, of proletarian origin, who seeks admission will probably meet with little difficulty, provided his record contains nothing damaging. But the candidate with bourgeois antecedents has to get more backing and undergo a longer period of probation. There are some non-proletarians, engineers, professors, and so on, who hold Party tickets. But they are a small minority.

Even the Communist of long-standing has no security of tenure. From time to time, there takes place a "purge" of the Party, just as of other Soviet organisations, in the course of which all who wish to are encouraged to report and criticise the shortcomings of their fellow members. These "purges" involve an orgy of what the private schoolboy calls sneaking, by no means free from envy and malice, and this very Russian process ends in the eviction of a number of people from the Party. After a grand "purge", two years ago, although no particular factional issue was involved, it was reported in the Press that a hundred and thirty thousand Communists had been deprived of their Party tickets. Another and still more drastic purge seems to have been begun quite recently.

The organisation of the Party is on the model adopted for most Soviet institutions, which will be described later on. It is designed to concede the appearance of some democratic control, while ensuring that in fact the rank and file have no effective voice. The basic Communist unit is the "Cell", of which each important industrial or governmental organisation has one; and the highest organ is the "Politbureau", a small committee of fifteen or so members. But most of the real power, and consequently the control of all Russia and everything in it, lies outside even this small body, in the hands of Stalin and his few intimate confidants. Stalin, doubtless, could not afford to relax the control of the Party machine which his position as Secretary-General gives him, and he must also reckon with other factors, particularly the Army. But, with these limitations, and given that he keeps the firm support of the G.P.U., his influence is probably not far from absolute.

It is difficult for the foreigner, who has not seen it at close range, to realise the dominant role played by the Communists in Russia. The Party not only provides the motive power which drives the whole Russian machine, but also most of the working parts of the machine itself. Everything of importance that is done in Russia is done under Communist inspiration and is generally

actually carried out, or at least supervised, by Communists. This state of things may be a little less marked since Stalin laid down his Six Points, in 1931. One of these Points was to the effect that greater scope must be given to trustworthy technical experts, whether they belonged to the Party or not. But, speaking generally, Communist control of everything is as complete as ever.

The whole régime is full of contradictions to the western mind. The Party claims to stand for a new order of things and, sociologically, to be far in advance of the rest of the world; or rather what it imagines to be the position of the rest of the world, for the average Russian is almost unbelievably ignorant of what really goes on outside the Soviet frontiers. And yet, in spite of its claim to represent the vanguard of progress, the leading theories of Communism are, in fact, lifted ready-made from Karl Marx, a German economist who must have formed his opinions in the period of 1848, a time which seems to us now almost indefinitely remote.

Again, the Party claims to be exclusively of, or representative of, the masses. This claim, to us, naturally suggests some idea of democracy and the expression and realisation of the popular will. But there is nothing of this in Russia. Only an insignificant fraction of the masses belongs to the Party which, in any case, is the reverse of

democratic in its organisation. But perhaps the most striking thing of all to the foreigner is the way in which the Communist Party changes, if not its real opinions, at least its whole practice, at the orders of its leaders. They may defend their attitude as Marxian Dialecticism. But long words do not explain how a Bolshevik can have brought himself sincerely to believe in turn first that, War Communism, then the NEP, then the Plan, and now the present rather nondescript régime, were each of them the true policy for Russia's salvation, to be enforced at all costs.

Making all allowances for the necessarily unstable and transitional character of the years since 1917, these quick changes of front imply either an incredible flexibility of mind, or else an entire lack of principle. One is often disposed, in consequence, to dismiss the whole of the endless preaching of the Bolsheviks as an elaborate imposture. Latterly, there has been more and more of hypocrisy and cynicism about it all, but the evidence as a whole suggests that in earlier days there was even more of real enthusiasm and sincerity. The Bolsheviks, like other fanatics before them, had the gift of blindness to their own inconsistency. *Credebant quia impossibile.*

Sooner or later, it must have occurred to every foreigner living in Russia to make mental comparisons between Communism and some religious

movement. The Bolsheviks have been variously likened to the Early Christians, to the Jesuits, and to the Puritans; and if such comparisons have any value, perhaps the best one is to Islam in the first century or so after Mahomed, the period when the Faithful began their campaigns of expansion. There is, in each case, the same spirit of aggression, and the same simple trust in the efficacy of Force. The Party, like the Jesuits, hold that the end may justify the means, and nominally at least, shares with them the idea of obedience to Authority and the obligation to serve in any place and in any way which Authority may direct.

There are, again, several points of superficial resemblance between a prevalent type of Party man and the Puritan of the Seventeenth Century, or what we are in the habit of imagining the Puritan to have been. Like the Puritan, the Communist is often dressed with conspicuous plainness, in a dark-coloured Russian blouse, and a pair of jack-boots. In the Komsomol, particularly, it used to be the correct thing to appear very roughly dressed. In 1932, however, their Secretary-General publicly declared that the young Communists had as much right as anyone else to collars, or to lip-stick, according to their sex; and to clinch the argument, so to speak, the Press reproduced a photograph of the Secretary-

General himself wearing a clean white collar. This incident is of no importance in itself, but, nevertheless, it is symptomatic of the trend of things.

The good Communist, moreover, often has a Puritan air of grimness, by no means necessarily assumed. He must often be a very tired man. After a long day's work at his ordinary occupation, he is supposed to be ready to devote more hours to social service; to lecturing, to "combating illiteracy", and to a dozen other things. Many Communists, too, lead a very sober life. There is nothing whatever of Puritanism in the Bolshevik moral code. But the Party man who indulged himself unduly in wine or women, or who was idle or frivolous, ran the risk of being looked on officially as unfitting himself for the task of "Building Socialism"; such conduct was "anti-social", the gravest offence against the Communist code. Until lately, the consequences of this might well have been serious for him. Someone would have been only too likely to report on his failings to the Authorities, and he might have lost his Party ticket, no trifling matter, as there is small sympathy for "backsliders". But, nowadays, with the general relaxation of standards which seems to have marked the last year or eighteen months, the frivolous Communist probably has less cause for anxiety.

Again, some of the Communists might fairly claim to have reached a more than Puritan standard in their contempt for the goods of this world. Foreign opinion often fails to do justice to the Revolution in this respect. There is a widespread belief that the Bolsheviks' main concern since 1917 has been to feather their own nest. Doubtless there are cases in which the charge is true; but it has not been true of the Communist movement as a whole. For one thing, the Communist, until lately, was nominally at a disadvantage in the matter of income as compared with the rest of the community.

The non-Party man was, and is, supposed to be at liberty to earn as much as he can, and the annual incomes of some technical experts reach a respectable figure when expressed in paper roubles; perhaps a thousand a year, or even more, if translated into sterling at the fictitious official rate of exchange. The actual purchasing power, of course, is only a fraction of the theoretical exchange value. But the Communist, whether employed as a Commissar or an office-boy, was limited by a self-denying ordinance to a maximum which, translated into sterling, came to less than a nominal four hundred a year.

It is said, however, that this limitation has now become a dead-letter. In any case, the Communist has always enjoyed other economic

advantages, and particularly so nowadays as the result of recent tendencies. He always had, for example, a certain pull in the matter of housing, a highly important item in Soviet Russia; a better chance of the employment he wants; and, above all, comparative freedom from the dread of persecution at the hands of the G.P.U. which hangs continually over the rest of the community. But with the increasing differentiation in living standards which has been growing up since 1931, the Communist's advantage is increased. He is more likely than the non-Party man to be able to get himself into a privileged category, in the factory or elsewhere, as regards food and accommodation.

It is worth remembering that by all accounts Tsarist Russia was conspicuous for small-scale, and occasional large-scale corruption. At least so far as the Administration is concerned, this seems to have ceased to exist under the Soviets. It can, of course, be pointed out with truth that there is little temptation to run risks in order to acquire cash in modern Russia, seeing that there is so little to be bought with it; and certainly the risks are great, given the all-pervading espionage of the G.P.U. Nevertheless, these are not complete explanations.

The truth is that the Communists as a Party have been intent, not upon personal gain, but

upon Power. This is, of course, merely a generalisation. Not all the Party, or nearly all of them, are incorruptible ascetics or even, if it comes to that, all believers in Communism. But that there have been large numbers of true zealots is not open to question. In fact, the True Believers have been the typical Bolsheviks in the sense that they have set the pace for the rest, who have outwardly conformed to them.

But it is equally certain that among the three million odd members of the Party must be countless cynics, doubters and adventurers, who joined it or have remained in it for what they hope to get. What is the real proportion between the Faithful and the time-servers, not even Stalin and the G.P.U. can judge. If they could, needless to say there would very soon be no time-servers. But one may guess pretty confidently that the difficulties of the last two years have added vastly to the ranks of the disillusioned. Probably only among the boys and girls of the Komsomol, who have been grown in the Communist hot-house, is the percentage of sincerity still high.

The points of likeness between Communism and any religious movement of the past are superficial rather than real. But it still seems broadly true to say that with the convinced Bolshevik, his Communism takes the place of a religion. It used to be supposed that the Russian tempera-

ment inclined strongly towards religious mysticism. If this appreciation was right, it may account for the fervour with which many Russians have embraced a creed which must strike the outsider who does more than glance at it, as being inadequate. But whatever may be the explanation of Russian reactions to them, it must be remembered that the leading ideas of Communism and those of the World-Religions are not only different but fundamentally opposite. Christianity and Islam, for instance, have it in common that they lay their emphasis less on this material world than on another, a non-material one. Both claim that their mandates and their prohibitions are based on a more than human standard.

Communism, on the other hand, is concerned with this life only, denying the existence of any other. Its standards and its aims are purely human and material, and it rejects the possibility of higher ones. Both Christianity and Islam, again, are essentially individualist in principle, in that the central idea they teach is that of a Divine interest in each man and woman. Bolshevik theory, on the other hand, takes the Community as the unit. Among other things, it follows from this that the individual must be regarded as of small importance, and hence that only an impersonal social justice is necessary; such things as Tolerance, Pity, and Forgiveness are superfluous

and even undesirable, seeing that they may impede the efficient working of the social machine.

The foreigner, on first reading of Bolshevik theory, is at once impressed by its conception of service to the community without personal gain. But if the foreigner leaves it at that, he will remain under a profound misconception of the reality. Not a few enthusiastic visitors to Russia have returned to this country and published articles in which the word "idealism" recurs again and again. To use this word implies a failure to grasp an essential point of the Communist experiment. During the last fifteen years, there has been much resolute effort on the part of the Bolsheviks and, apart from a great deal that is utterly repellent to the ordinary civilised mind, not a little disinterestedness and actual self-sacrifice. But whatever else there has been, there has been no "idealism", for the reason that this is precisely what Marxist materialism sets out to destroy.

The main objective of the Bolsheviks, notably in their great effort represented by the Five Year Plan, was to benefit the Community; but to benefit it in material things; to give it, for example, a larger and a cheaper supply of boots, and of every other commodity, than would be possible under a capitalist system. This point cannot be emphasised too strongly. Unless it is realised that the Bolshevik outlook is exclusively materialist,

the course of events in Russia becomes quite unintelligible. What has happened is that as the result of too much materialism, the means, in Russia, have already quite obscured the end.

With or without the acquiescence of the ruling faction, increased Production, originally planned in the interests of the Community, has step by step become an independent objective in itself. The Russia of 1933 is a sort of super-Trust, without ethical principle, or, indeed, any principle at all, but dominated by the ideas which we sum up as "Big Business". These ideas are applied on a scale, and with an energy and a ruthlessness, which no individual Capitalist has ever cared, or dared, to attempt, but unfortunately for Russia, they have been applied with such crass inefficiency that collapse is likely to be the outcome.

CHAPTER V

BOLSHEVIK GOVERNMENT

THE political organisation of the Soviet Union is singularly complicated. The Union is made up of seven federated Republics. By far the most important of them is the R.S.F.S.R., or Russia proper, with Siberia. The R.S.F.S.R. covers ninety per cent of the area of the whole country, and has about sixty per cent of the inhabitants. It effectively dominates the rest of the Union. Besides the R.S.F.S.R., there are two federated Republics in Europe, White Russia and the Ukraine. There is a Trans-Caucasian Republic, and the remaining three are Central-Asiatic.

Several of these federated states contain lesser units, known as Autonomous Republics, of which there are a total of fourteen in the Union; and there is a still smaller unit, the Autonomous Area. This "federal" aspect of the Union's political composition, is catered for under the Constitution by the establishment of a body known as the Council of Nationalities, which is parallel to, and of equal authority with, the

highest organ of government proper. All that really matters, however, is that there is one Communist Party and one G.P.U. common to the whole Union.

The Soviet Government proper, or what corresponds most nearly to the government in normally constituted States is, even theoretically, only very indirectly representative in character. The franchise is on an occupational, rather than a territorial basis, and, on any given number of inhabitants, the towns are allowed an artificial preponderance in representation over the rural districts of about five to one. There is no secret ballot, voting being public. The lowest electoral unit is the village, which elects a Soviet. The village Soviet sends delegates to the next higher political unit, known as a Congress of Soviets of a Neighbourhood. This Congress in turn is represented at a Congress of the District, and so on, up through Congresses representing larger and larger areas to the Congress of Soviets at Moscow. This last-named body, which is the nearest Soviet approach to a Parliament, is supposed to meet once a year. When it has dispersed, it delegates its power to a Central Executive Committee (the TSIK), which, in turn, leaves things in the hands of its own Praesidium, a much smaller body. This Praesidium works through the Council of Commissars. Each Com-

missar is in charge of a Government department, and thus his functions may very roughly be compared to those of a Cabinet Minister in this country.

It is obvious that this long chain of delegation of authority would prevent public opinion, if there were such a thing in Russia, as expressed at a village election (always supposing that political opinions could be effectively expressed there), from controlling, or even reaching, the Council of Commissars. The whole system, in fact, is designed to check any attempt at popular control, since the Bolsheviks reject the democratic principle altogether, even as an internal matter within the ranks of the Proletariate. But this is not the whole story. From the village Soviet, at the bottom, up the political ladder, the proportion of Communists increases. The percentage, on the lower rungs, is necessarily small. But by the time the Council of Commissars is reached, it has risen to one hundred.

This fact is the key to an understanding of political conditions in Soviet Russia. It is difficult to find any reasonable illustration of them in terms of English life. One would have to imagine that there was in this country a not very numerous, but wide-spread semi-secret society, actively backed, without regard to law or humanity, by a nightmare Scotland Yard. The members

of this Society would hold all the posts in the Cabinet, and the responsible positions in the Civil Service; all the senior commands in the Army, Navy and Air Force; all the seats on the Bench; and an effective majority on the Boards of the Banks, and of all commercial and industrial enterprises whatsoever; as well as the official positions in the Trade Unions, and the Co-operative Societies.

Even so, the picture would be incomplete. One must imagine the Society as in absolute control of all the newspapers, the publishing houses, and the printing presses; to say nothing of the theatres, the cinemas, and the B.B.C.; as well as of the Jockey Club, the M.C.C., and the Football Association. It must also be imagined that the members of the Society would owe, and give, their allegiance not to the institution in which they happened to be serving, but to the Society itself. From time to time, the Society would issue, either publicly or through individual members, general instructions which might cover any and every form of human activity; and if the instructions provoked too much protest or resistance, Scotland Yard would ensure the disappearance of the recalcitrant.

These "directives", to use the Russian phrase, would, in the last analysis, be issued on the responsibility of one man, whom we may imagine

to be a native of some remote village in south-western Ireland, English neither by race nor language; and who, unseen by anyone, lived a mysterious life somewhere in Whitehall, guarded by cohorts of detectives with machine guns.

All this may sound unduly imaginative but, nevertheless, it represents not inaccurately the state of things in present-day Russia. There is, indeed, an atmosphere of unreality there, but this extends less to the Communist Party than to everything outside it. It would be inexact to describe the Soviet Government as a Government of puppets, since all its Members are also Members of the Party as well as of the Administration. But it is perfectly correct to say that the Government, as such, is no more than a screen for the Bolshevik Party. The screen is never very opaque and at times it falls apart. At important moments the Party, so to speak, forgets itself and, ignoring the Article of the Constitution which lays down that the supreme organ of authority is the Congress of Soviets, issues a manifesto of its own, which is published in the whole Press, instructing the Central Executive Committee to take some particular action. The instructions, needless to say, are promptly carried out.

What is true of the Soviet Government, applies

with only slightly less force to the Komintern, or Third International. In theory, of course, the Komintern is an international body which merely happens to have its headquarters in Moscow. But this is the thinnest of fictions, and in practice, the Komintern is no more than a façade of the Russian Communist Party, members of which are able to dictate its policy, in outline and in detail. This being so, it follows that the issue which has so often been raised in our House of Commons, as to whether the Komintern is, or is not, within the control of the Soviet Government, is, in fact, without any reality. Neither the one, nor the other, is an independent entity. The ultimate responsibility for the actions of both lies with a third body, the Bolshevik Party.

It is not only to the highest organisations, such as the Komintern and the Government itself, that these considerations apply. In a proletarian state, it is natural that the Trade Unions and the Co-operatives, should play an important part, on paper at least. But, here again, the Party's influence is the decisive factor. The Unions are not free to make use of economic conditions to drive the best bargain they can for their workmen, nor can the Co-operatives exploit any market or source of supply to the advantage of their members. The State must effectively limit the free-

dom of action of both, since the exigencies of the Plan must take precedence over all sectional, not to say individual, interests.

A dispute over a collective wage agreement, for instance, between a State trust, under Communist direction, and a Trade Union, equally directed by Communists, must necessarily have about it something of the fight between Tweedle-dum and Tweedledee. In any case, there is always in the background the Enormous Crow, in the shape of the Communist-run State, which will put an end to the battle whenever it sees fit. Such a system naturally tends to stifle all individual resource and initiative, a fact which the ruling faction realises clearly enough. Efforts of various kinds are continually made to overcome the loss of efficiency which results; but, at best, these can only be partially successful. The trouble is inherent in the system itself.

But perhaps the most striking of Russian paradoxes is that the Communist oligarchy should claim, not only before the outside world, but before its own people, to be the type and example of a Dictatorship of the Proletariate. There is no question of avoiding an awkward subject, or of allowing a discarded item of policy to be quietly forgotten. In spite of its now glaring unreality, the idea of Proletarian Dictatorship is still emphasised.

A phrase in frequent use is "The Workers' Republic". The natural impression conveyed by these words, at least to a Western European, can only be of a state run by the workmen in it. But, whatever Soviet Russia may be, it is certainly not this. Indeed, the most bigoted Communist, supposing he were familiar with conditions elsewhere, could not deny sincerely that the weekly wage-earner, in any fully democratic state, did, in fact, have much more voice in affairs, great and small, than does his Russian Comrade.

To take a rather obvious illustration, some millions of workmen in England are dissatisfied with their wages and hours, or suffering from unemployment, and a majority of them believe that the Capitalist system is to blame. They are at liberty to vote for a strike in their Unions, and for a Socialist candidate at the Polls. The strike may fail, and, hitherto, no Labour Government has been in a position to substitute Socialism for Capitalism on any large scale. But the English workman has a run for his money, and few would deny that it was a fair run.

The Russian workman, on the other hand, seldom dares to strike and wastes his time in voting. All he can do is to complain. He is allowed to do this, but within limits. If he exceeds them, he may have to reckon with the most serious

consequences to himself. To all this a Communist would reply that the Capitalist system had entrenched itself so strongly, by its own foul means, that the right to strike which democracies allowed their workers was only a mockery. As for the Parliamentary vote, he would continue, the Bourgeoisie would always be successful in deluding and dividing the workers, and if by chance they failed, they would resort to force. This much of the Communist argument is not impressive. It may have had some force in the time of Karl Marx, but it has none in the England of 1933.

When pressed about his own country, however, the Communist, if he were frank, might make some case for himself. He might point out, with truth, that the Russian working-class notwithstanding their nominal Dictatorship, were not yet far enough advanced to be given control of their own destinies, and that the Party exercised the Dictatorship in their name, and in what the Party considered to be their best interests. Such a statement would at one time have had some foundation. The Party, or rather those members of it who really believed in Communism, originally were confident that their policy was ultimately for the highest material good of the Community, that is to say of the working-class, since all other classes are to be eliminated.

But there remains the glaring discrepancy between a nominal proletarian dictatorship and an actual communist oligarchy, a discrepancy which the Bolsheviks have succeeded in minimising to their own public with considerable adroitness, by making use of the weaknesses of human nature generally and of Russian simplicity in particular. They know well that the active principle, so to speak, of their favourite mental state of "class-consciousness", is envy. Men are unknowingly far more preoccupied with the advantages enjoyed by those economically better placed than themselves, than they are with their own economic state. They will put up cheerfully enough with great privations, on condition that everyone within their range of vision shares them. This condition is realised under the Communist system. Russia is certainly not a Workers' Republic but, at the same time, it is no one else's Republic, unless it be the Party's.

The Proletariate can see for itself the formerly privileged classes being treated with discriminatory harshness; and it hears itself ceaselessly assured that it has now become an aristocracy, and the successor to all the advantages formerly claimed by others. The appeal may be to the baser side of human nature, but it is not unsuccessful. In spite of disillusion and disappointment, a good part of the Russian proletariat seems still to feel

that it has at least more justice than it had under the Empire and so is put into the comparatively receptive and acquiescent frame of mind failing which the Communists could hardly continue to lead it by the nose.

The working-class has no more voice in its own destinies than has a flock of sheep. The Plan must come before everything, and the requirements of that huge scheme condition the life of each individual workman. Wages, hours and conditions of work, even the kind of work performed; housing, the supply of food and clothing, of necessities and luxuries; everything, in short, is related directly or indirectly to the Plan. In the nature of things, the Plan does not permit of popular interference or control; and since the masses cannot be given any real power, the Bolsheviks have ingeniously substituted shadow for substance.

I do not suggest that this has always been done in a wholly cynical spirit. Perhaps the contrast between fact and fiction is only fully apparent to those who have been brought up in one of the despised bourgeois democracies. Probably the enlightened Communist, not without some justification, would regard his methods as the most advanced compromise practicable, given the conditions. But he would never dream of saying so in public. Frankness in this connection would

be politically unthinkable, and Communists are the most unblushing hypocrites.

Possibly the best way to sum up the Bolshevik handling of the Dictatorship of the Proletariate, is to say that the Party reserves all important action to itself, but stimulates and encourages the rest to talk as much as possible. All the talk, and the minor action which follows it, is based on the convention that the Dictatorship is a reality, and that the Proletariate are actually masters of all they survey. Criticism and suggestion may range over any and every subject, on the one condition that it ceases as soon as the competent authorities have reached a final decision on the issue in question. Persisted in beyond that point, what was a welcome expression of opinion, comes dangerously near to "counter-revolution".

It is very difficult, in a reasonable space, to convey any picture of this singular system in action. The columns of the Press are thrown open to the workers who have criticisms to make, or proposals to offer. Every organisation of any size has its "Wall-Gazette", something between a parish magazine and a notice-board, in which everyone concerned is encouraged to make suggestions, and particularly to air their grievances, personal or otherwise, against the management or their fellow workers. Again, factories have their Committees, which are supposed to have the widest

powers in the direction of representing the interests of the rank and file as against the official element. These committees have a legitimate function in looking after the welfare-work of their organisations, and so on, but they, like the proletarian "delegates", male and female, who used to be attached to various functionaries, must on the whole be a distinct impediment to efficiency. There is a strong strain of "class-consciousness" running through the whole system. This is most evident in the practice of conducting "purges" already referred to in connection with the Party itself. These "purges" are an illuminating feature of communist "proletarian" tactics, and perhaps deserve mention at some length.

In industry, and even in the Administration, there remain some non-proletarians whose technical knowledge or experience has made them indispensable. The Party affect to regard these individuals, on account of their origin, as actual or potential "Wreckers", and the Proletariate are warned to be on their guard against them. In the same order of ideas, is the official condemnation of "bureaucracy" a word that has become a term of abuse. It implies more or less deliberate intention on the part of employees in offices to hamper by Red Tape the efforts of the honest toilers in the factories. It is obviously

necessary for the Revolutionary Proletariate itself to conduct its defence against these insidious attacks. A "purge" of any given institution is thus not conducted governmentally, but under the direction of a committee from some other, and indisputably proletarian, organisation, which smelt out and evicted the "Wreckers" and the "Bureaucrats".

A couple of years ago, for example, the State Bank in Moscow was "purged" by a delegation from a local factory. In these circumstances, it is not to be wondered at that the process tends to resolve itself into a bourgeois-hunt. The authorities are willing enough that it should be so. True, the individual discharged quite unjustly as the result of a "purge" might be in a precarious position, since it is a legal offence for any other state organisation to re-employ him. But that cannot be helped. "Class-consciousness" must be maintained and, from the Communist point of view, to set the Proletariate on to detect and uproot "class-enemies", however fictitious, is a convenient and inexpensive way of doing it.

The whole Bolshevik method of dealing with their public has about it something of an inverted advertising campaign. With us, it is the advertiser who provides the publicity, with the object of suggesting to the public that it wants

what he has to offer. In Russia, it is the Proletariate which is encouraged to make a display of such rights and powers as it has—of its goods, so to speak—in order that it may impress itself with their value.

CHAPTER VI

PROPAGANDA

A GREAT many things in Russia are not what they seem. The Union itself, which purports to be a free association of federated states, is in reality one unit, closely bound together by the Party and the G.P.U., whose influence is everywhere dominant and who, together, enforce a single policy, more or less uniformly, on the whole heterogeneous collection of races. Again, a system which professes to be a Dictatorship of the Proletariate is seen to be a Communist oligarchy, if not actually an autocracy; and so on, in things both great and small.

But, in contrast to these anomalies, the Bolshevik method of government, in fact, as opposed to form, is simple and consistent. They rely on persuasion, backed by force; in other words, when their Propaganda fails the G.P.U. is called in. In both these directions, the Bolsheviks have acquired a technique which is admirably suited to their requirements. They had the foresight to recognise, long ago, the immense possibilities of propaganda upon the backward but impres-

sionable Russian people. By Propaganda, of course, here and throughout this chapter, I mean the internal and domestic application of it. Soviet Propaganda abroad is an entirely different thing and will be dealt with later.

A high intellectual or artistic standard is not a matter of importance. The main thing is to ensure a monopoly, and a large volume. A monopoly is easily provided for. In the first place, there is no internal competition, all political activity of any kind whatsoever being the exclusive preserve of the Communists. No rival political organisation would be tolerated for one moment. Adherents of former political parties, if they are not in gaol already, would immediately find themselves there if they attempted to revive their opposition. Moreover, apart from some hundreds of Americans and Germans employed in Russian industry, mostly engaged on contract, there are very few non-communist foreigners in the country. Even those that there are, the Russian, unless he is officially instructed to make some contact with them, must avoid like the Plague, fearing with reason persecution at the hands of the G.P.U. should he compromise himself by contact with these "alien elements". This fact tends to make the life of the foreigner in Moscow even more depressing than it would otherwise be. It is very difficult for him to judge local conditions and opinion—which, of

course, is the G.P.U.'s. object. A foreigner would at once be expelled if he attempted to preach anything other than orthodox Communism.

At the same time—a fact which is not generally realised abroad—Soviet citizens are rigidly confined within the Union. Except on government service; or on missions approved by the authorities; or in very rare cases, on medical grounds, it is for practical purposes impossible for the Russian to leave Russia, except by escaping over the frontier, a dangerous proceeding. The object of this prohibition is to prevent on the one hand the dissemination abroad of unfavourable accounts of Soviet conditions; and, on the other, to avoid the corruption of good Soviet manners by evil bourgeois communications; the latter a curious confession of inferiority, seeing that the most overwhelming advantages are claimed by the Communist for his own system.

Given the absence of foreigners from Russia, the effect is to isolate the Russian from direct contact with the outside world. As for indirect contact, all books, periodicals and newspapers of foreign origin, naturally have to pass through the Customs, where anything politically contraband may be suppressed. Russia, thus, has no first—and very little second-hand—knowledge of anything beyond her frontiers and, in consequence, no independent standard by which

to judge of Soviet conditions, or to check Communist assertions.

This is of great practical advantage to the Communists. They have virgin soil for their propaganda, and they exploit it to the fullest possible extent. They have, indeed, developed the whole propagandist idea to a point which no other state has ever dreamed of. The first, and ultimately, perhaps, the most important application of it, is to education. The Bolsheviks have made great efforts to provide schools of different types. Popular education hardly existed under the Empire, and the Soviets had to begin almost at the beginning. They have been handicapped by a lack of money and by an acute shortage of personnel. Many of those with some education themselves, and who might thus have been available to teach others, fell into the category of "class-enemies", and so have been "eliminated" in one way or another.

But given the obstacles, it must be recognised that the Soviets have made some real advance. The percentage of illiteracy, for example, throughout the Union, is now claimed to be under forty, a large reduction on the pre-War figure. The chief reason which has inspired the Communists to press forward educational development is that they realise the capital importance of instilling their doctrines into young children while they

are at an impressionable age. Even elementary education is officially supposed to be given a "Marxist" bias; though precisely how Marx's views can be applied practically to, say, arithmetic, it is hard to see. As the child advances, so the propagandist element in its education becomes more pronounced.

There is, moreover, increasing class differentiation. The child of bourgeois parentage was, till lately, denied altogether any opportunities of higher education, however intelligent or promising he or she might be. As is perhaps inevitable in the circumstances, Soviet higher education is anything but a satisfactory process, and the generation which it is now turning out is ill-equipped for the many scientific and technical posts for which it is urgently wanted. A young man can qualify himself fully as an engineer after a course of eighteen months only, or even less; and he probably begins the course with a scant foundation of general culture.

But, in spite of shortcomings, the system is efficient from one Bolshevik point of view at least, in that it produces young Communists in adequate numbers. One must always remember, when wondering about Russia's probable future, that as time passes the proportion of Russians who can remember anything else but the Soviet régime, grows less; while the number of those who from

childhood have been subject to Communist influences, to the exclusion of all other influences or standards, grows greater. In half a generation's time, practically everyone under forty will be the output of the Soviet propaganda mills; a synthetic, not a natural, product. What this state of things may produce no one can do more than guess. In the meanwhile, the Bolsheviks have reason to be satisfied with the progress achieved; and, all deductions made, Russia has probably gained on balance by being given some popular education for the first time.

Their educational efforts may be compared to a long-term propagandist investment on the Bolshevik's part; but, in the meanwhile, they make use of every other possible channel. Seeing the amount of illiteracy, an astounding number of books, originals and translations, are printed annually. The Soviets claim that the total circulation of all their newspapers taken together now exceeds the corresponding figure in any country but the United States.

There is unquestionably a thirst for learning in Soviet Russia which must be reckoned to the Communists for good, even if they do pervert it for their own purposes. All the publishing offices, of course, as well as the whole Press, from the *Isvestya*, the government organ, and the *Pravda*, the Party's paper, downwards, are under their

absolute control and are used only for propagandist ends. The outside world attracts relatively little notice. Only the *Isvestya* regularly devotes much space to foreign news, imparting to it the required Communist bias by suitable suggestion and repression. From this newspaper one derives the clear impression that the British Empire, for instance, is on the verge of complete collapse, torn as it is by revolutionary strikes and bloody colonial rebellions.

But the main centre of interest is internal affairs. Day by day, columns and columns are printed on the progress of the Plan; the situation of agriculture, and so on. "Self-Criticism"—the exposure and condemnation of shortcomings or failures on this "Front" or that, a practice approved some years ago by the Party as a stimulus to efficiency—is generally prominent.

Those of our own politicians who see themselves as champions of Russia, used often appear to be indignant at the Despatches from the *Times* correspondent at Riga. They did not realise, evidently, that the great bulk of that correspondent's material is not original, but comes textually from the columns of the Soviet Press where it has appeared as "Samo-Kritika"—self-criticism—self-administered for tonic purposes. There is a certain sameness between the issues of any particular Soviet newspaper, from day to day,

and a strong family likeness between one paper and another. This is perhaps natural, seeing that one single point of view only is permitted to find expression. But the Russian has no other source of information and the cumulative suggestion of reading very much the same thing, every day for years, is unquestionably strong.

As an adjunct to the Press, the Communists use the wireless. Broadcasting is of fairly recent development in Russia. Receiving sets are expensive and often of types now regarded as out-of-date in this country. Nevertheless, loud-speakers are to be heard in many of the workmen's clubs and other institutions of the sort which abound in Moscow, and I believe that there is a considerable number of private sets. Transmission starts early in the day, and seems to be carried on almost continuously from one station or another. There is a certain amount of indifferent music, but for the most part lectures, speeches, and talks are broadcast, mainly on current industrial topics.

In accordance with Communist practice, these talks are often given by the "workers" themselves. A female boot-operative, for instance may address her Comrades on the current problems of the factory at Kharkov, or on whatever and wherever her job might be. These talks are hardly of general interest; but at times a pleasantly human touch is provided by the speaker, whom

agitation leads to talk at a formidable pace, with gasps between the sentences. On the whole, the broadcasting programmes seem to reproduce pretty closely the tone and matter of the daily Press. The British workman would find this continual "talking shop" intolerably dull. But the Russian does not seem to mind so much. In any case, there is no alternative for him.

In addition to the newspapers and the wireless, the Bolshevik has a useful channel of propaganda in the theatre and the cinema. The Russian is naturally inclined to enjoy the play—he is a bit of an actor himself—and in the conditions of intolerable overcrowding at home which is now the almost invariable rule in Moscow, he is all the more ready to spend an evening out. The Trade Unions have blocks of tickets for sale to their members at a cheap rate, and audiences are never lacking. I cannot remember ever to have seen more than a very few empty seats at any play.

By no means all the theatres are propagandist, or even mainly so. Some specialise in "classic" plays, and seldom give a modern piece. On the other hand, there is a number of favourite "revolutionary" works which are constantly repeated. Some of these are better than others but few of them even profess to have any literary merit. Just as in the Victorian melodrama virtue

triumphed over vice, and the wicked baronet was confounded in the last Act, so the average "revolutionary" piece ends with the success of the heroic proletarian and the unmasking of the dastardly bourgeois counter-revolutionary. In a slightly more sophisticated form, this is the theme of many of even Meyerhold's productions, which have acquired a reputation abroad for the originality of their presentation. A notable specimen of this type of play is the revised version of *Hamlet*, produced last year, in which the Prince is acutely "class-conscious" and so is a prey to remorse; while Ophelia is addicted to drugs.

The censorship, it may be noted, is ultimately vested in a committee of local workmen who, in cases of doubt, are called in to decide whether or not a work is sufficiently proletarian in sentiment to be produced. Although it may seem an unpromising medium, there is even a propagandist ballet. The two best-known specimens are "Red Poppy" (which most tourists to Moscow will have seen), and "Footballist" (sic). "Red Poppy" is not without some merit. Its most pleasing feature, perhaps, is the English villain who, to mark his depraved "ideology", is made up as Sir Austen Chamberlain. There is an impression in England that the Russian Ballet, and the stage generally, is still at a high level. It is not so. What used to be representative of

Russian art to the outside world—for example the State ballets, the opera of Rimsky-Korsakov, or the plays of Tchekov—is no longer “contemporary”, to use a common Soviet expression. They have nothing of “proletarian culture” about them and they are alien to the spirit of the times. Performances go mechanically on, with the old conventions, the old décor, and the old costumes. But there is an indefinable air of dust and decay about it all, as of something which only survives precariously, soon to die and be forgotten. The Russian who said “There can be no ballet without Grand Dukes” was not far from the truth.

A more convenient and more effective vehicle of propaganda than the Stage, is the Screen. The Russian film-directors have evolved a new manner which seems based, in accord with the spirit of Communism, on the minimising of individual figures and the stressing of the effects of given ideas or actions on the many. This method has its disadvantages. It involves a repeated and sometimes irritating switching from one scene to another, in order to illustrate the many-sided aspect of one event. It has also tended to develop certain conventional pictures—a crowd at a mass-meeting; tractors working in an immense flat field; masses of whirling machinery in a factory, and so on—to convey certain conventional ideas,

a mannerism which becomes exasperating on continual repetition.

But these are minor drawbacks, and, on the whole, the Soviet film is, at the worst, in welcome contrast to the second-rate American article, with its nauseating banality and its feeble reliance on the personal appearance of Hollywood beauties, male and female. A cinema theatre is easy to improvise and most of the larger industrial centres, even in remote districts, have their own. The film is thus one of the most useful educative and propagandist weapons at the Communists' disposal. It is another, and a powerful, voice in the chorus which chants in unison.

But in spite of it all the Russian public will not always take the cinema in a properly serious spirit. Even as long as three years ago, occasionally a third-rate Hollywood film contrived to get itself shown in Moscow. Poor though these were, they used to have a tremendous success and attract larger crowds than the best of the legitimate propaganda productions. Last year, if my informant was right, an important decision was taken by the Authorities. I was told that the Soviet film organisations have lately been allowed, or ordered, to supply a "strong love interest" with all their important productions for 1933. If this is true, it is a most significant sign of the times.

But it is really hardly possible to convey to those who do not happen to have seen it at first-hand, any convincing impression of how far the propagandist idea enters into the whole Soviet scheme. As has been pointed out already, the very form of Government itself is, in a sense, an item of propaganda, and so it goes on, all down the scale. An Englishman can admire the consistent thoroughness and the occasional adroitness displayed by the Communists, and he can see for himself that their methods, whether they impress him personally or not, have on the whole been successful. But he feels that they would never do for him and his countrymen. Both manner and matter are to him more than a little ridiculous. He is very used to hearing crude manifestations of "The Public School Spirit" ridiculed at home. In Russia, he observes a caricature of it carried to inordinate lengths. "Play Up, Play Up, and Play the Game!" is an exhortation which becomes tiresome on too frequent repetition.

But it is precisely this which represents the tone of all the flood of propaganda poured out in furtherance of the Five Year Plan. That it happens to be a question of making, not runs, but Enamelled Hollow-ware, or whatever the particular product may be, does not mend matters. To us it still seems crude, tedious and priggish.

The Communist would doubtless dismiss such criticism as only another proof of the decadent cynicism of Western Bourgeois mentality. But, so far as England is concerned, he would be quite wrong. The British workman would find him and his propaganda just as insufferably boring as does the British Bourgeois.

But the Englishman has another, and a stronger, reason for remaining unimpressed. The Communists have always stressed the advantages of the continuity of their Planned Economy over the haphazard booms and slumps of Capitalism. Many intelligent people in this country are impressed by this argument which, indeed, is a powerful one. But it is important to realise that in Russian practice, as opposed to theory, there has been little or no planning of a kind that might be applied to our own economic structure. The Russian Plans pay no regard whatever to any necessity for a carefully considered limitation, distribution and balance of productive forces. They are, in effect, nothing more than schemes to rush on at all costs the wholesale industrialisation of an agricultural country. "We must carry through our industrial revolution," says the Communist, "if not better, at least more quickly than any Capitalist State, even America, managed to do in the past; the pace is everything and nothing else matters."

The Englishman, naturally, is reminded of his own industrial revolution. We, also, "got rich quick" at a formidable speed. Our Industrial Revolution is not a matter for regret; one might as well "regret" our rainfall, or that East Anglia is flat. But the fact remains that had it happened, or been made to happen, differently, the politician and the eugenist might not now have to deplore an unnatural mal-distribution of the population, nine of us living in towns to every one in the country; a distribution based largely, moreover, on the now failing export of coal and cotton; the agriculturalist, whether landlord, farmer, or labourer, might not have seen his industry slowly decline through the inevitable demand of the crowded towns for cheaper and cheaper food; the workman and his family in the industrial Midlands and North might not have to live so often in surroundings of squalid ugliness; and so on. There is no need to prolong the catalogue since we know it all too well.

But we can hardly be expected to admire or to sympathise with a vast campaign of propaganda, the aim of which is nothing more than wholesale industrialisation at a break-neck pace. Russia, of course, is so large that she can stand more of it than we could in these islands. Nevertheless, the more success the Bolsheviks achieve on their

present lines, the more of those ills from which we now suffer will they inevitably lay up for themselves, or their successors. To us, with our industrial history, much of the Communist preaching seems reckless and stupid.

CHAPTER VII

THE G.P.U.

THE word “propaganda” is really inadequate to describe the flood of information, misrepresentation, suggestion, encouragement, and threat, which spreads from the Kremlin over all the Russias. A new word is wanted for what is a new thing. It is partly objective, in that it gives an account and an explanation of what the authorities are doing, and why. But its chief objective is emotional. The whole essence of the Communist case, while the struggle to carry out the Plan was at its height, was that actual hardships are more than justified by the prospects of the future. As they put it, the present generation must sacrifice itself for the sake of its successors. But the Communists never supposed that an appeal for self-sacrifice, addressed on purely intellectual grounds to a whole nation, would be effective with more than the few. As politicians, they realised that for the crowd something more than an impersonal appeal to altruism; some emotional stimulus, was wanted.

With this in mind, they used their many-sided propaganda to arouse and maintain a feeling of

tension and crisis. They were right in thinking that the more they could raise the emotional temperature, the more natural and convincing would sound the appeals for more and more effort which they were driven to make. "The Country is in Danger" is a cry as old as history, and all the Bolsheviks did, and are still doing, was to put it in rather new words. They sought to reproduce artificially in the public a state of mind like that of a country at a critical stage of some vital war, and by the continual suggestion that danger threatens from without and within, they have to some extent succeeded. But the attitude which they adopt towards the outside world may well, in the end, bring catastrophe on Europe.

But this is really a subject almost unconnected with Russian internal affairs, and must be discussed elsewhere. As for internal danger, it is real only to the extent that a drastic slowing down of the current Plan might face the dominant clique in the Party with serious political embarrassment. For the rest, it is non-existent, and what survives of the Class War now represents only one more form of propaganda. Bourgeois or other victims are still found from time to time, to encourage the rest; or, to be more exact, to keep up the excitement and to demonstrate that the moral State of Siege maintained by the authorities was, and is, fully justified.

The task of doing this falls to the G.P.U. whose functions are complementary to those of the Party propagandists. The Party decides on a course of policy and the G.P.U. is there to give it a background of Terror, which ensures that there shall be the minimum of opposition. If need be, it eliminates those who remain recalcitrant, or can even be suspected of doing so. The O.G.P.U., to give it its full description, has an innocuous name. The initials stand for United State Political Department, but in spite of the mildness of its title, it is an organisation to which the much-abused word "sinister" may rightly be applied. It is in the direct line of descent from the Tsarist Okhrana and the earlier Bolshevik Tcheka.

It is on a larger scale and better organised than the Okhrana ever was; and if, in present circumstances, it is not called on for the mass-butcheries which distinguished the Tcheka, it would be a mistake to assume that a change of name implies any change of heart. It is the most powerful organisation in the Soviet State, perhaps not even excluding the Party itself. Hitherto the Party has always maintained at least some semblance of unity, even in the days of Trotsky; and it has been faithfully served by the G.P.U. But if events were to lead to some decisive split, it seems certain that the faction which was sup-

ported by the G.P.U. machine would inevitably have the better of things. One cannot help wondering whether, in course of time, the G.P.U. may not become a Praetorian Guard which can make and unmake the Caesars.

The G.P.U. is more than a mere police organisation. It has an Army of its own, nominally sixty thousand strong, but actually in all probability a great deal stronger, of carefully picked men well supplied with modern weapons. These troops are privileged in various ways, and are regarded as perfectly reliable. The Corps is available to suppress disorder at home, should such a thing arise, and detachments are assigned to the regular Army in the field, to ensure, from behind, discipline and energy in the face of the enemy. It is not surprising that the regular troops should not be too well-disposed towards their comrades of the G.P.U.

The real extent of the secret organisation of the G.P.U. is, of course, unknown outside the Liubianka, the Moscow headquarters of the Department. But it is probable that public opinion exaggerates the number of agents directly employed. Any very large establishment would be superfluous, since the whole population of the Union are potentially available for the purpose. The G.P.U.'s practice in this connection is to summon anyone who is thought to know anything

of the matter under investigation. When the examination is over the individual summoned has to sign an undertaking to keep his or her mouth shut. A person may, of course, be questioned more than once or be instructed to obtain information from, and report on, other people. Few are foolhardy enough to try to resist, and the result is that no one in Russia can be sure when, or by whom, harmless enough words of his may not be reported to his undoing. Even disinterested foreigners contract the habit of looking over their shoulders and whispering. Fear of the G.P.U. hangs like a cloud over all Russia.

The G.P.U. and, through them, the Communist oligarchy, is very well informed of all that is said or done in the Union. But the collection of information is only one of the several functions of the G.P.U. The chief of them has been, so to speak, "executive"; that is, as political police, to keep the spectre of Terror always in the background of men's consciousness. It would not be difficult to fill many pages with stories, only too well-founded, of cruelty and cynicism on the part of the G.P.U. But to do so would add nothing to the case. The function of the G.P.U., as was that of the Tcheka before it, is to inspire Terror, and they have done it.

No reliable figure of the actual number of executions by the G.P.U. is to be had. But it is

certain that if the annual total has declined, of late years, it is mainly because of a shortage of suitable material. The campaign for the collectivisation of Agriculture, and the chaos that has resulted from it, has provided a number of victims, but this is hardly in the G.P.U.'s. normal line of business, as it were. They are mainly concerned with Industry and the Army.

At one time it used to be the practice to shoot prisoners in the open. Nowadays, they are disposed of secretly in a cellar. Secrecy and mystery, indeed, has been carefully cultivated by the G.P.U. Let us suppose that X. incurred suspicion, or merely that it was decided that X. was a good subject of whom to make an "example". Without warning, the G.P.U. would enter X.'s room at two o'clock in the morning. X. would be hurried away; his wife left behind. The next day, perhaps, and for day after day, she might ask for news. She would be told nothing. After a week, a fortnight, a month, she would be suddenly informed that X. was in a certain prison and that she might send him clothes or food on given days of the week; or, perhaps, she might simply be told that X. had been shot a month before.

The work of the G.P.U. is not confined to Russia itself. Experience has shown the Kremlin that not every Communist, even, is proof against the flesh-pots of Capitalism. Important Soviet

missions abroad, therefore, have attached to them a representative of the G.P.U., rather thinly disguised as a diplomatic secretary or otherwise, among whose duties is to watch and report on his own chief and his fellow-members, of the Staff. The escape of Bessedovsky, the Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in Paris in 1930, and the kidnapping of the emigré General Kutepov—if the latter was really the G.P.U.'s work)—showed the world what the G.P.U. can do and how it does it.

At times, it seems to display what almost amounts to a sense of humour as when, three years ago, it arrested and sent to the timber-forests, the whole management of a large State Trust which had shown a poor balance sheet. But the new directorate did no better than the old, and they, in turn, were packed off, *en bloc*, to the North to take the place of their predecessors who returned to Moscow and resumed where they had left off. At other times, the G.P.U. descends to an incredible pettiness. After the break in Anglo-Soviet relations in 1927, the authorities decided on reprisals, (carried out, of course, on their own unhappy countrymen), presumably as a means of showing the general public that they were undismayed. At least one perfectly innocent man was shot, and the G.P.U. did not omit to arrest and send into exile the

elderly servant-woman who had been employed by the British representative to answer his front-door bell.

But these rather random anecdotes do not convey the importance of the role of the G.P.U. in the Soviet organisation. It must be remembered that its procedure is not only secret but arbitrary. Its prisoners may be arrested, exiled, sometimes shot, without even the form of a judicial trial, and without any charge having been made against them, or any opportunity being given them for defence or explanation. The Soviets have, of course, a Civil and Criminal Code, a body of Labour legislation, and so on. But one of the worst anomalies of Soviet Russia is the discrepancy between the legal position and actual fact. For example, the Death Penalty was formally abolished in principle years ago. Yet, since its abolition, there have in all probability been more executions in Russia than in the rest of Europe put together.

One of the main sources of this discrepancy between law and practice, a discrepancy which extends almost everywhere, is the power assigned to the G.P.U. to proceed "administratively" which, in effect, means to proceed just as the G.P.U. pleases. Under the Constitution the Supreme Court is charged with the supervision of the "legality" of the proceedings of the G.P.U.

But, in fact, the G.P.U., acting "administratively", is above all Law. This state of affairs is, incidentally, a convenience to the Soviets in their relations with the outside world. Just as the Soviet Government when reproached with the activities of the Komintern protests that it has no legal control over that body, so when it is reproached for the conditions in the timber-forests, for example, it makes use of what is essentially the same plea, reversed. It points to its Statute Book and replies that the conditions complained of are forbidden by the Law. This may be so. But, in Soviet Russia, what the Law does or does not lay down has nothing whatever to do with the case.

From time to time, the Kremlin decides that it is expedient to combine its two main ideas of government in one demonstration, so to speak. The result is a State Trial, by means of which the authorities dispense patriotic propaganda to the Russian public, and Terror to the victims, and to others who may find themselves in similar circumstances. There have been a number of these "Trials", but in only three of the recent ones have foreigners been immediately concerned. On one occasion, some German engineers were among the accused. British subjects were directly involved in the Lena Goldfields Trial in 1930, and of course in the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial,

which has just ended. What happened in the Vickers Trial is well known to everyone, but perhaps some account of the Lena Trial, at which I happened to be present, may be of some interest as illustrative of Soviet "justice".

In this case, the Kremlin, for various reasons, were anxious to break the Lena Goldfields Company's concession, and to take over its assets themselves, but without paying the compensation which was likely to be adjudged against them under the arbitral clause in the Concessionary Agreement. At the same time, they were by no means averse to using the occasion for some anti-British propaganda. They therefore decided to proceed in such a way as to cripple the company's operations and, at the same time, to provide themselves in advance with some excuse for any arbitrary infringement of the company's concession which they might commit. At all events, at midnight on a given date all the Russians in responsible positions on the company's staff disappeared, only a few foreigners being left. Since the company had interests in various parts of the Union, some of them thousands of miles from Moscow and from each other, these simultaneous arrests implied good staff-work on the part of the G.P.U. For a time, nothing was heard of the prisoners. A few weeks later, the relatives of some of the prisoners were informed of their

whereabouts and in due course certain of them were released.

Then silence fell again for several months, and was last broken by a short notice in the newspapers to the effect that the Trial would begin that day. It was held in a large hall which had in other times been the dining-room of a Moscow millionaire. Traces of over-florid decorations were still to be seen on the walls. The three judges sat at a table smoking and picking their teeth. The lawyers looked bored. From time to time some interested member of the public would get up and say something. On the wall behind the judges hung the inevitable red banner, with white lettering,—THIS COURT IS THE ORGAN OF THE PROLETARIATE. This “slogan” represents a cardinal principle of Soviet law. Hitherto, I suppose, all systems of human justice have at least claimed to base themselves on some absolute standard; often a standard derived from contemporary religion, but at all events one theoretically applicable to all men at all times alike, however partial it may at times have been in actual practice. This does not hold good in Soviet Russia, where “Justice” is conducted on the Marxian basis of Class, a principle triumphantly re-asserted lately by Vishinsky, the State prosecutor in the Vickers case.

In the case of private individuals, this principle

implies that the gravity of the offence depends not on the offence itself, but upon the origin of the person who commits it. Thus the theft of a diamond ring, for instance, might be a venial error on the part of a proletarian, but the theft of the same ring, in the same circumstances, might be a capital crime on the part of an ex-bourgeois. When it comes to a State Trial, the implications are much wider. As Lenin said, "The Court is the Organ of the Proletariate". The Revolutionary Proletariate is told that it is now exercising a Dictatorship, and one of the first duties of this Dictatorship is to carry on the Class War. The function of the Court, therefore, is to prosecute that War. It does not matter that the evidence upon which the Court convicts is patently false, manufactured, or even utterly absurd. The business of the Court is to convict, and to do so with as much propagandist advertisement as possible. The Court has never failed in this duty yet, and so long as the present régime lasts, it never will, however weak the evidence and however innocent the accused.

But to return to the Lena Trial, what immediately struck the foreign observer was the extraordinary demeanour of the Russian accused themselves. They seemed morbidly anxious to incriminate themselves as far as possible. Although in the dock on capital charges, they hastened to

volunteer statements supplementing and enlarging upon what the Prosecutor had said against them. The charges themselves ranged from the improbable to the fantastic. In addition to the main accusations, which related to the company's technical policy, there was the ever-popular charge of espionage, and one individual was accused of having set fire to, and destroyed, a neighbouring State zinc-works, incited thereto by one of the company's technical advisers, a British subject. The accused having pleaded guilty, they were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. There was, fortunately, only one death sentence, and this was afterwards commuted. The fantastic nature of most of the charges and the singular attitude of the accused are easily to be explained. The authorities, in addition to some anti-British, and thus patriotic, propaganda, wished to have a comprehensive indictment of the foreign company on as many counts as possible. The G.P.U. delivered the goods.

The G.P.U., in fact, can generally obtain from their Russian prisoners any statement, however improbable, which they may require. They persist, if necessary, for months. The prisoner may be kept in solitary confinement; he may be denied sleep, and questioned by relays of agents for hours upon hours; he may be told that others have "confessed" already, and that he may as well

make a clean breast of it. If he has a wife or children, he is warned that they will be made to suffer acutely, if he will not sign. He may be taken from his cell, in the middle of the night, to be shot, but taken back to it again for further questioning. Finally, he may be promised his life, and a light sentence, in exchange for a suitable "statement". It is not surprising that the unfortunate man should at last break down, and agree to sign anything, though it implicates not only himself, but friends of his whom he knows to be as innocent as himself. It is commonly believed in Moscow that prisoners are often led to sign "confessions" which they have not even been allowed to see, or actually to put their signature on blank sheets of paper, to be filled in later by the G.P.U., as occasion may demand.

The proceedings at the Lena Trial naturally received much publicity in the Soviet Press. Particular attention was devoted to the Company's English geological expert, who was supposed to have set fire to the Soviet zinc-works. This gentleman, to the best of my belief, has no connection whatever with politics or politicians in this country. Yet the Soviet Press saw in him, as they put it, a combination of Sherlock Holmes and Colonel Lawrence, hand-in-glove with the late Lord Brentford and Mr. Winston Churchill. The *Isvestya* concluded a long article devoted to his activities

by describing him walking home down Piccadilly from a party given by Mrs. Baldwin, whistling "Rule Britannia" and chuckling to himself at the thought of the havoc he had wrought in the Soviet Union. But this display of imaginativeness was soon afterwards surpassed. Another, and more important State Trial, took place not long afterwards. The case for the prosecution turned upon the anti-Soviet activities of a certain Russian living abroad. In the middle of the proceedings it was discovered that on the date at which this individual had been alleged to have been plotting with the accused he had, in fact, been dead for months. But in spite of this set-back, the prosecution carried on, and duly secured the appropriate convictions.

Public opinion in this country was considerably exercised over the recent Metropolitan-Vickers Trial. In particular, there was a good deal of misgiving as to the very definite line taken by His Majesty's Government, before the case had even come on before the Soviet tribunal. We have become used to associate our own, and thus any, Courts of Law with the idea of impartiality, and we find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that any Prosecution could press its case to the end unless on some sort of foundation of fact, or at least of probability. But no one need have entertained such misgivings in the case of the

Soviet Court. There was no essential difference between the Vickers case and the Lena and the Ramzin Trials, to which I have already referred. It was not merely a matter of bias, or of improper procedure, but of something more. The whole of the charges, in general and in particular, were without a foundation of any kind, as the G.P.U., Vishinsky the Prosecutor, and the Kremlin, knew perfectly well from the beginning. But from their point of view, this does not matter at all. They are only concerned with a case's propaganda value.

CHAPTER VIII

INDUSTRY AND FINANCE

POLITICAL fiction is the rule in Soviet Russia. A Federation of independent republics under a Dictatorship of the Proletariate, turns out to be in essentials one highly centralised unit, under something very near an autocracy. There is a paper code of Law, but the G.P.U., which intervenes everywhere, is bound by no law. At Geneva, Russia describes her official policy as one of Internationalism and Disarmament, while, in fact, she is crudely and violently militaristic. Yet at least one would have supposed that the economic system of the only professedly Communist State would have been Communism. But it is not. What was distinctively Communist about the original scheme has largely disappeared under the pressure of economic facts.

What has taken its place perhaps does not fit closely into any ordinary socialist classification. On paper, it is a form of State Socialism. But, as time goes on, a great deal of its spirit and its whole practice becomes not only different from,

but directly opposite to, the rather loose humanitarianism which forms the main motive power of the Socialist Movement in this country, for instance. The Russian economic system has always been in a state of flux and now, in the effort to attain some sort of efficiency, it tends more and more if not towards capitalism itself, at least towards ultra-capitalistic methods.

Russian industry is organised in a series of Trusts, some of which, as for example Azneft, the trust which runs the Azerbaijan oil-fields, are very large units. The trend of policy has been to try to make these Trusts more independent of the Government and each other, and more responsible for their own commercial policy and, incidentally, for their failures. State credit is now, in theory at least, extended to the Trusts only on a commercial basis, and the aim is to make each of them financially and economically self-supporting. They are given as free a hand as regards commercial policy as the Plan permits; they are allowed to compete with each other in various ways and they even have a good deal of scope in the matter of prices. They thus function, in many ways, much as a Trust would do in a normal capitalist State. But the broad lines of their policy, and sometimes the details of it, must be laid down in advance in conformity with the Plan; from which it follows that their operations

are not necessarily economic in the capitalist sense of the word.

The main point, however, is that there is no element of individual profit in the system. At the end of the financial year the profits of a Trust, if there are any, are divided in a fixed ratio between the State, Depreciation and Development funds, and so on. If a loss is shown, it is necessarily made good by the State; and the management, incidentally, may well find itself in prison, or in a Timber Camp. Cases have even been reported in the Press of the State Bank, as the principal creditor, having sold up the assets—office furniture, and so on—of bankrupt Trusts. But probably such transactions are not regarded seriously, but rather as demonstrations for propaganda purposes.

From the Russian workman's point of view, there is actually little of "Socialism" in this system. The workman has a non-Contributory Social Insurance Scheme, and at one time, though not now, could draw unemployment benefit. He has, or had, moreover, some sense of moral advantage in that he works for the State and not for private interests. He is continually assured, through the various propaganda agencies, that the State belongs to him and that he is therefore working for himself; and often he used to believe it. But this never corresponded to the facts.

The workman not only has no effective voice in

the control of affairs, but has no share in the wealth he has produced, as a Marxist would put it. The Trust that employs him looks on him and his production from a point of view not different from that of the Capitalist employer. It makes small material difference to the factory worker that a percentage of his Trust's nett profits should eventually go to the Soviet Treasury and not to a body of shareholders. Indeed, the men who worked for foreign concessionary enterprises, when these existed in Russia, were often better off than their comrades in State concerns, since the Trade Unions were not only allowed, but encouraged, to extort terms from the foreign capitalist which they were not allowed to ask from a State organisation.

As upholding the sectional interests of their members, the Trade Unions are necessarily helpless. The ultimate authority which determines conditions of work, and everything else, is the Party. While various organisations such as the State Planning Department, the Supreme Economic Council, the Ministry of Labour, the Workmen's and Peasants' Inspection, may all have a direct or indirect say in the terms of a "Collective Agreement" between a Trade Union and a Trust, the agreement has nothing of a genuine bargain between employers and employed about it. In these circumstances, it follows that strikes are very exceptional. There was a large-scale

strike not long ago in the textile area of Ivanovo-Vosnesensk in which, apparently, even local Party members were involved and which required drastic suppression. But as a rule strikes are rightly regarded by the workmen as futile and dangerous.

The limitations which apply to the Trade Unions, apply equally to the Co-operatives. On paper, these appear a most important feature in Russian economy. By 1933, it is intended that the Consumers' Co-operatives shall have nearly fifty million members. But they are ill-managed and, in any case, they do not play the part of Co-operatives in other countries. They do not pay dividends and they are allowed no scope to act independently in their members' interests. Like everything in Russia, they are subordinated to a higher and centralised control, and there is no practical difference between a Co-operative Store and a State Shop.

Hours and conditions of work are thus dictated from above, in accord with a general scheme. This scheme has been radically altered from time to time. Until two years ago, the aim was to ensure the maximum of continuity and output, by means of a Five-Day Week and a Three-Shift Day of seven hours a shift. This arrangement was actually put into force over a large section of Industry. The Five-Day Week involved an in-

dividual rest day for each person on one day at the end of every five. These individual rest-days, of course, fell on continually changing days of the seven-day calendar week, a fact which led to delays and confusion in business.

This and other objections have brought the Five-Day Week into disfavour. Three seven-hour shifts were found, in many cases, to leave inadequate time for the maintenance and the repair of machinery, with the result that it depreciated at an alarming rate. The present trend of policy, it seems, is to revert to a six-day week with a common rest-day for everyone; and to what amounts to an eight-hour day. Overtime is limited by the Labour Code, but under the pressure of the Plan, overtime is probably more common than in the average Capitalist State. Wages, as will be noted later on, are now mainly on a piece-rate basis.

So far as the outside world is concerned, the most important feature of the Russian system is the State Monopoly of all foreign trade, import and export, and it is no less important to the Russians themselves. For practical purposes, the monopoly is absolute and nothing enters or leaves Russia except in accord with the State's plan. The whole of Russia's foreign trade, therefore, has little or nothing to do with the ordinary factors of international supply and demand. Im-

ports are governed wholly by the requirements of the Plan, and consist, in the main, of machinery and raw materials, in spite of the fact that there is an acute shortage inside Russia of almost all articles of consumption.

Russian export policy is also conducted entirely in the interests of the Plan, regardless of popular wants. Russian exports of any particular product do not necessarily come from a surplus of the product in question, in any ordinary meaning of the word "surplus". Goods are exported to obtain foreign credits, regardless of whether there are any of them left over for home consumption, or not. The system simply amounts to a general, and a crushing, form of indirect taxation. By their control of exports and imports alone, the rulers of Russia regulate the standard of living of the entire population. The standard has by now been depressed near to the "Desperation" point. But the Bolsheviks can, whenever they decide that the people will stand no more, at once raise the standard of living by exporting fewer, and importing more, of the articles for which there is a crying need. But they would have to choose between this, and their Plan. Lenin was right when he said that the monopoly of foreign trade was one of the "Commanding Heights of Communism".

Like most other aspects of their economics,

Soviet Finance has undergone radical changes. In the early days of War Communism it was supposed that money might be abolished altogether, and so far as the Tsarist currency was concerned it was, in fact, abolished through inflation on an astronomic scale. But with the NEP Soviet money came more or less into its own again, though Russian currency never actually reached the point of being quoted on foreign Bourses. Later, under the Plan, money again began to lose its reality.

Only an expert could give an authoritative description of the whole Soviet financial system. But even to the layman some of its peculiarities are obvious enough. The currency is unusual in that it consists of an issue of Chervonetz notes, secured on a statutory gold reserve in the State Bank; and, in addition, a further issue of Rouble notes, secured on the Chervonetz. The Bank issues a periodical statement of its gold holding. It is not impossible that this statement is fictitious, and that the gold is not there. But it really makes no difference whether it is there or not. The outstanding point about Soviet money is that it has no relation to other currencies. The State Bank publishes regularly a list of the rates of exchange with foreign countries. In the case of sterling, this rate, which seldom changes from month to month, used to be given as 9.4 roubles

to the pound. (On our abandoning the Gold Standard, the rate was raised to 7.5 roubles to the pound sterling.) But these figures represent no reality at all save that it is at that official rate only that the State Bank will give roubles for sterling.

It is a criminal offence either to import, or to export, roubles to or from Russia. A few are smuggled and are obtainable in Warsaw, Berlin, Vladivostok, and elsewhere, sometimes at the rate of 100 roubles or more to the pound. This last figure, incidentally, probably represents something like the true rate of the rouble in terms of foreign values. But, speaking generally, the Soviet currency is effectually isolated from that of the rest of the world, and the paper rate of exchange, in consequence, is a mere fiction of the State Bank, representing neither exchange value, nor purchasing power. This fact, it may be noted, makes comparisons between such things as rates of wages, standards of living, and so on in Russia, and elsewhere, a matter of great difficulty, since the common standard of reference usually provided by the currencies of two countries under comparison, is in this case missing.

But the unreality, if that is an appropriate word, of Russian money, is even more evident in the Union itself. Whether or not the Soviets keep a gold reserve, does not matter. The point

is that they control not only the printing presses, but also the great bulk of the sources of all supplies, and of their distribution; and, above all, that they control prices. It follows that they can print as many, or as few, notes as they choose without producing the symptoms that follow inflation or deflation in a normal State. Prices and quantities remain the same, from the point of view of the consumer, irrespective of the number of paper notes he may happen to have in his pocket. Officially, Soviet policy is opposed to inflation but, as happens so often in Russia, practice has not followed principle.

A rise in wages is a convenient and universally intelligible means of propaganda; and partly for legitimate economic reasons, and partly to suggest a fictitious sense of prosperity by a higher wage-standard, the Soviets have latterly printed notes on what would be a terrific scale in an ordinary State. In three years the note issue nearly trebled itself. But the authorities have, of course, maintained their hold on prices and on the rationing system; with the result that a policy which, elsewhere, would have had a profound effect on a country's external trade, and internal prices, has, in Russia, served in the main only to emphasise the shortage of goods. Everyone has more paper money in their pockets. Prices on the private market have risen fantastically,

but the main result is that the queues in front of the State and Co-operative shops have become longer, and that the scanty stocks are sold out earlier in the day than they were before.

The State's finances are managed in a way peculiar to Russia. The main sources of revenue are the contributions of the Industrial Trusts; Taxation, direct and indirect; and Internal Loans. Direct taxation takes the form of Turnover Tax and Income Tax. The largest single source of revenue, however, is Vodka, the manufacture and sale of which is a State monopoly. Loans seem to be regarded as a more or less permanent source of revenue. The issues are boosted by a flood of propaganda and aided by strong official pressure, and since there is no other opening for investment, and since inflation and a goods-famine result in a superfluity of cash, they are generally taken up in spite, one must suppose, of a feeling of misgiving on the investor's part, seeing that dealings in some of the largest issues were suspended by the authorities for the period of the first Plan.

The essence of Soviet State finance is to secure a quick turnover. They aim at "mobilising" as much of the country's resources each year as possible, an object which their control of all economic activity enables them to realise to an astonishing extent. The workman who is paid,

if indirectly, by the State on a Friday, must spend his wages on the State's goods on Saturday. The result is a very rapid circulation of wealth. By the end of the first Five Year Plan, the authorities estimate that no less than 53 per cent. of the entire national "income" would be passing through the Treasury in one year.

The Soviet's financial relations with the rest of the world have undergone changes parallel to the phases which have succeeded each other in their domestic politics. The period of War Communism which followed 1917 was marked by repudiation of all liabilities, Governmental and private. With the NEP, Russia became more conciliatory. She granted concessions to foreign enterprises and showed some disposition to recognise that to admit partial responsibility for past indebtedness was the easiest way to obtain short-term credit; and ultimately the large-scale loans which the Kremlin then regarded as a means of financing the policy of industrialisation.

With the end of the NEP and the coming of the Plan, this tendency was reversed. Foreign concessions were bought out, or rather driven out; large foreign loans ceased to be mentioned and the idea of "Socialist Accumulation" held the field. The Communists made up their minds to carry through their schemes on their own current account, so to speak, without relying on blocks

of capital borrowed from outside. Though they have always tried to help themselves out by as much short-term commercial credit as they can get. If rumour was correct, Stalin himself was largely responsible for this policy of financial self-sufficiency. He seems profoundly to mistrust everything that lies beyond the Soviet frontiers, and especially to fear financial entanglement with Capitalist states. It was said that it was he, personally, who intervened to veto a reasonable compromise on the debt question almost arrived at with France.

The effects on Russia of the Bolsheviks' financial policy must be dealt with in a later chapter, but it may be mentioned, in passing, that her extensive commercial credits have cost her very dear. In one way or another she probably pays over twenty per cent. for them, on an average, a fact which must be considered in connection with the possibility of repudiation on her part at some future date. As for Russia's War, and pre-War, debts, there seems no reason to suppose that she has any real intention of accepting responsibility for them; or, indeed, even if she wished to accept responsibility, that she would be able to pay more than a negligible percentage in interest on them for many years to come. Her current financial position is precarious enough as it is. The late Labour Government, presumably for political

reasons of its own, staged an elaborate conference with the Soviets on the subject. But it was hardly necessary to hold a conference to find out that the Bolsheviks couldn't pay, even if they wanted to, which they most emphatically do not.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND

FAR the most important factor in Soviet economics is Agriculture. Even at the end of the first Plan, when a large development of industry will have taken place, it was estimated that there would still be about an hundred and thirty-five million Russians living on the land, as against thirty-five millions, or less, in the towns. It is one more of the Russian paradoxes that the Bolshevik revolution should have been carried out by townspeople in the interests of the towns, in an overwhelmingly agricultural country. The perhaps inevitable consequence has been a clash between town and country which first began in the early days of War Communism, reached a climax about 1930, and now threatens disaster to the whole system.

The story can be told shortly. In 1917, the Bolsheviks took the lead in inducing the peasants in the Armies to break up and march home, by urging them to seize the land at once. But, having got the land, the peasants thereby became small capitalists and thus increasingly unsympathetic to the Communist idea. From the Bolshevik point

of view, the mass of the peasants became an "alien element" in their struggling Communist State, hostile, or at best neutral to their efforts, and difficult or impossible to organise and control. In addition to this political antagonism, there quickly developed an economic clash. The inefficient Communised industry could only supply a few of the demands of the peasants for manufactured goods, and what it could produce was inferior in quality and extremely dear. The towns, on the other hand, continued to demand more, and cheaper, food. But there was no inducement to the peasant to grow food for them since he could get no return for it except in depreciated currency which bought little or nothing. His inclination was, naturally, to produce only for his own needs or, if he had a surplus, to hoard it in the hope of a rise in price. As time passed, things became worse rather than better. The Communist tried persuasion, threats, and force to induce the peasants to do what was required of them, but without any great success.

Another factor was presently added. The Bolsheviks turned their minds to the possibility of food exports, particularly grain, on a large scale in the interest of the Plan. Before the War, the greater efficiency of the large estates had produced enough to feed the towns and to provide a surplus to sell abroad. The break-up of these

had left the land uneconomically sub-divided. The "strip" system, with small and often scattered individual holdings, lack of capital, traditional and unsound methods, and primitive implements—wooden ploughs for instance—combined to make post-War agriculture wasteful and inefficient. The standard of living was very low, and the conservatism and ignorance of the peasant would have made it a slow business to teach him better methods, even if anyone had tried. To modernise and re-equip Agriculture would have been the chief problem that any Russian Government, of whatever character, would have had to face.

The Bolsheviks made the attempt in a manner peculiar to themselves. They seem to have made up their minds, once and for all, about four years ago, that an individualist Agriculture and a communised Industry could not continue to exist permanently side by side, and in this they were probably quite right. Seeing that one or the other must eventually give way, this meant, in the circumstances, that the individual farmer had to be eliminated. When the decision was taken to begin the campaign in earnest there was a good deal of doubt, even inside the Party, as to whether it could succeed. But a partial success, at least, was vital and the Communists threw their whole strength into the effort. Things went compara-

tively well with them at first. They were checked in 1930, but later resumed the advance. Last year, however, they had again to retreat, and by now a situation seems to have developed which is more serious than any which the Bolsheviks have had to face since 1918.

“Socialised Agriculture” takes two forms; the State farm and the Collective farm. The latter, on paper, is divided into three or more types of organisation, but the distinction between them is theoretical rather than real. The State farm is, as its name implies, a direct State enterprise. The most characteristic examples of the latter are the “Grain Factories” in the South. Some of which are enormous organisations, the largest of them covering hundreds of thousands of acres. But there are State farms of every sort and size, some of them quite modest units devoted to dairy-ing and market-gardening. The State farms, moreover, endeavour to perform the very neces-sary work of supplying pure seed and improving the strains of cattle.

But the total area covered by the State farms is insignificant in comparison with that of the Collectives which also vary greatly in size and character and which form the typical feature of the new Communist Agriculture. They are charac-teristic manifestations of the Communist method, being ostensibly independent and even demo-

cratic organisations, but in actual fact the artificial products of propaganda and force; force, in this case, openly predominating. In theory, a Kolkhoz is a voluntary association of individuals who, according to the type of organisation, pool some or all of their assets; land, stock and implements; and under a management chosen by themselves, farm on a co-operative basis, dividing the profits at the end of the year, or at other appropriate intervals. To a Western mind, the essential condition of such an arrangement would be that membership of the association should be voluntary, and that the unit should be autonomous, deciding its own methods and its own internal economy. But these two conditions, which seem important to us, are absent in Russia. Real autonomy is out of the question, seeing that the Collective farms, like everything else in the Soviet Union, are dominated by the Communists.

The Collective farms, so far as all-important questions of organisation and production are concerned, have been kept by the Communists under as rigid and centralised a control as they have been able to exert. Had they succeeded in carrying through their policy on its original lines, there would have eventually been no real difference between a State farm and a Collective. The whole of Russian Agriculture would have fallen under the absolutist control of the Party

Group which happened, at the time, to be in the ascendant at the Kremlin. But the Communists have not been able, as yet, to attain this degree of control and to judge by present tendencies, it has become very doubtful if they ever will.

As for the voluntary principle which the word "co-operation" suggests to us, it has already been pointed out that the whole agricultural campaign was essentially an act of self-preservation on the part of the Bolshevik régime. True, the Communist argued that in trying to socialise Agriculture he would in the end be benefiting the mass of those engaged in it; on paper, there might have been some justification for this claim, though to a Western mind the possible good is outweighed by the actual ill. But at least it was very evident that the Communists did not undertake their campaign spontaneously and willingly. They would have preferred to postpone or avoid it, but circumstances were too strong and they did not dare. They felt compelled to act, not from concern for the agriculturist, but to save their own industrial régime. In these circumstances, the organisation of "voluntary" co-operation has involved more coercion and, incidentally, more human suffering, than perhaps any other single measure or policy of the Soviet régime since it began. Of the scores of millions of peasants

who joined the Kolkhozes at the bidding of the Communists, the proportion who did so of their own unfettered choice was negligible. The vast majority were driven in by fear, or by deliberate economic pressure.

The whole movement had little or nothing that was genuinely voluntary or spontaneous about it. It was conducted on the orthodox Marxian basis of class. The one hundred and thirty or forty millions of Soviet subjects living on the land were regarded as falling into three loose categories; the Biedniaks, or Poor Peasants; the Seredniaks, or Middle Peasants; and the Kulaks, those who did, or might, "exploit" their poorer fellows by giving them employment. In accord with the political theory which requires a nominal dictatorship of the Industrial Proletariate, the Kolkhoz movement was to be conducted ostensibly in the interests of the Poor Peasant, who was to be treated as a member of a favoured class. The Seredniak was to be tolerated, but the Kulak was to be destroyed. It is this last-named process which has involved almost unbelievable inhumanity. What actually constitutes a Kulak was never, I believe, precisely defined, classification as such being left mainly to the discretion of the local Party Representatives.

It is certain, however, that the vast majority of them could by no stretch of imagination be

described as well-to-do farmers, as we understand the words. We should put them down as poor small-holders. To become a Kulak it was only necessary for the unfortunate individual to have raised himself very slightly above the low general level, a thing most of them had done by their own efforts, and in the ten years between 1918 and 1928. Again, the total number of those dealt with as Kulaks seems never to have been computed accurately. Probably only by a laborious sifting of the records of the G.P.U. could even a rough figure be arrived at, always supposing that the G.P.U. bothered itself to keep complete accounts. The proportion of Kulak families to the whole agricultural population has been assessed as something like 5 per cent., and even if this figure is too high, the total of men, women and children must have amounted to several millions.

Except in Western Siberia, they have by now all, or nearly all, been "liquidated" or "de-kulakised," as the Soviets phrase it. This process involved the sequestration of house, land, stock, and, most or all of the individual's personal belongings, and with this, often, the deprivation of any means of livelihood at all, since the Kulak is an "enemy of the Soviet Power", deprived of civil rights and debarred from entering the Collective farm to which his holding has been transferred. The number of suicides, among

women as well as men, was rumoured to have reached unheard of figures. Desperate resistance broke out here and there, but it was easily suppressed. An unknown number of Kulaks were herded into trucks like cattle and despatched to concentration camps in the North, there to work in the timber forests.

The "Slave Labour" which was at one time discussed at such length in our own and the United States' Press, consists largely of these unfortunates. Whether the term "slave" is applicable or not is a matter of definition. But it is not open to question that enormous numbers of Kulaks, and of other prisoners of the G.P.U. have been forcibly transported to the forest areas of the North and, once there, have no possible alternative but to work in the timber industry, at such wages as the authorities chose to give them. The Soviet authorities, of course, point out that under their Labour Code work without pay is forbidden and thus that conditions of "slavery" cannot exist; but, given the almost invariable discrepancy in Soviet Russia between law and fact and between theory and practice, this defence has little value. I have reason to know that in some cases, no wages were paid at all. The whole facts, either as to the total number of deportees and prisoners in the North; or as to the death-rate among them from such diseases

as typhus; or from the rigours of the climate, which must be particularly dangerous to those accustomed to the comparative mildness of South Russia; or, finally, as to the number of executions carried out there by the G.P.U., will never be known to the outside world. The Soviets, not unnaturally, will not admit an investigation by independent observers. But no lists of figures are needed to confirm that the "liquidation" of the Kulaks brought unnumbered personal tragedies to innocent men and women.

The Soviets' anti-Kulak policy, moreover, is one to appal the Eugenist. So far as the peasants were concerned, the years following the Revolution compressed as much of Social Selection (if that is the right term), into less than half a generation as normally could operate in a century or so. As the result of 1917, a considerable part of the peasant population started afresh and, in the main, started more or less level. The more intelligent and capable of them had tended to work their way forward, and these individuals must have represented, on the whole, the best strains in the rural population, that is to say, in four-fifths of the whole population of Russia. They were the Kulaks, and now the Communists have wiped them out on the Marxist principle of smoothing the way for the village idiot and ne'er-do-well. What they

have done is carefully to skim off the cream of the race, and throw it away.

Propaganda, as well as force, has been freely employed by the Bolsheviks in their agricultural campaign. They have an acute sense of publicity, and they ingeniously chose the Tractor as the symbol of the new régime on the Land. It was made the central feature of cinema films, pictures, posters, even of newspaper articles and political speeches which had any reference to the agricultural question. The Tractor Motiv runs through the whole score. Tractors, of course, represent more in the scheme than merely an item of propaganda. On many soils and, particularly, in the Wheat Belt, their employment will make for higher efficiency. But their rôle is comically over-emphasised by the propagandists who practically suggest, for the benefit of the townspeople, that Tractors in large enough numbers will grow corn or raise stock by themselves. In point of fact, the supply of tractors and the arrangements for keeping them running, are still quite inadequate to deal with the vast areas involved while, for various reasons, the number of horses available for ploughing and other agricultural purposes has dropped catastrophically. Thus, for a long time to come, the last state of Russian farming must, in this respect, be far worse than the first. The reason for the over-

emphasis laid on the tractor is that in Russia any piece of mechanism has a high propaganda value. It is not that the average Russian is mechanically-minded. He is the reverse. The mass of the people are even now unused to machinery, and interested and impressed even by simple and ordinary forms of it. This fact has been turned to great advantage by the Communists. The Five Year Plan involves the installation of countless new machines. By means of films, photographs, and models, this side of the Plan is impressed on the popular mind to arouse interest and admiration. In the same way, the tractor has been the favourite means of catching urban fancy in the matter of Collectivisation.

The immediate objective of the Communists in destroying private enterprise on the land and forcing the population into Collective farms was, of course, to gain control of the food supply, both for internal and export purposes. But their policy has, incidentally, been useful to them in another way. One of the chief problems of the Five Year Plan has been the supply and distribution of labour. The total amount potentially available is more than adequate, but the process of industrialisation has been so rapid that at one time there was an apparent lack of it. In any event its distribution is faulty. In some

trades there is congestion while, in the less popular ones, notably coal-mining, there is a chronic shortage. Even when the management succeeds in engaging enough hands, the men promptly desert and move on elsewhere in the hope of better-paid work, or better conditions. In these circumstances, the authorities look on the Collective farms as a reservoir of labour from which are provided contingents to work in this industry or that. The Communists have, doubtless, calculated that the spread of mechanisation to agriculture and the large increase in the area of the units farmed, will render a considerable part of the existing rural population economically superfluous; and that the socialisation of agriculture will enable them to take this surplus and transfer it to those sections of industry where it will prove most useful to their schemes.

That the mass of the peasants did not comprehend this implication of the policy, or that they could not resist even if they did comprehend, does not affect the Communist. He would maintain that for him the end justifies the means, even the savage inhumanity of the destruction of the Kulaks. And he could point out, even if it was from ulterior motives, that he intended to try to raise agricultural standards. From a technical point of view this is true. Larger units, more mechanisation, better rotation of crops and

breeds of stock, purer seed and so on, would raise the level of Russian farming.

Moreover, there is a great deal to be done or attempted for the peasant as a class. Hitherto, the standard of education, of hygiene, and of life generally in the average Russian village, has been very low, probably not very far removed from that of rural England in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. With the advent of the Communist-run Kolkhoz should have come some attempt at education for everyone. This may amount to a system of propaganda rather than education as we understand it, but, even so, it would represent an advance, and with education goes the standard Communist endeavour to stimulate "class-solidarity" by means of clubs, lectures, wireless, and so on, and an attempt to spread elementary ideas of hygiene. But if a superstructure of what one might call social services is to be built up, the first essential is that Communised Agriculture should be a going concern, economically. Unfortunately for Russia, it is not so.

In any case, reforms could have been made under another political system without exacting the formidable price on which Communist theory insists. To the average Western mind, the Communist has taken far more from the peasant than he can give. The peasant's wooden cottage

was dark and dirty, but under another régime, in course of time, he could have been taught to build a better one and to keep it cleaner. Now, possibly, he finds himself on a Sovkhoz, living with fifty others in a bare barrack-room, light and tidy enough, but to our minds, inexpressibly dreary; and the barrack-room represents a full-stop. It cannot be made much lighter or tidier than it is.

Again, the peasant may have been an incompetent small-holder, constantly struggling on, or over, the hunger line, though as a matter of fact this description would be unduly pessimistic. But he could have been slowly taught better methods and been left free to live his own life and achieve prosperity, if he could, by his own efforts, which is all that he wished to do in the great majority of cases. The Kremlin's agricultural policy, on the contrary, carried to a logical conclusion would force the scores of millions of Russians who work on the land into one amorphous mass of "Collectivised Peasantry" and that would be the end of them, not only as free agents, but almost as distinct individuals.

But it becomes more and more doubtful whether the policy will ever be forced through to a logical, or indeed, any conclusion. When the drive for Collectivisation began, it proceeded briskly enough at first, too briskly in fact, since

by the spring of 1930 the barbarous treatment of the Kulaks produced an unlooked for reaction. The Red Army is recruited very largely from the villages as opposed to the towns, and it so resented what was being done that the Kremlin felt it wiser to back down. The Communist workers who, after all, had only been carrying out their orders, were publicly and pompously rebuked by Stalin. The peasants who had been driven into the Collectives were allowed to leave them on certain conditions, and thus the tension was relaxed for the time being. But the campaign was resumed, and it is now claimed that over eighty per cent. of Soviet agriculture, outside Asia, is included either in the State farms or the Kolkhozes.

But it has now become less a question of paper statistics of socialised acreage than of the failure of the whole system to work. In spite of official figures claiming increased areas under cultivation, and in spite of climatic conditions for the harvests of '30 and '31 which, taken together, represented something over a fair average, Russia's food supply is less satisfactory than ever. The corn harvest of 1931 was a good average one, yet, by the summer of 1932 there was acute distress amounting in places to actual famine over much of the great Wheat Belt which stretches from the Rumanian frontier into Siberia. The towns

were in no better case. Food, in particular meat, fats, eggs and vegetables, was then admittedly scarcer and dearer than at any time since 1921, and in the last nine months the situation in town and country seems to have become steadily worse. The Communists have had three years in which to attempt to carry their schemes into practice. They have stopped, literally, at nothing in their attempt, but there can no longer be any serious question that it has failed. It would hardly be going too far to say, in fact, that it is on the verge of a general breakdown.

Bad organisation and miscalculations by an over-centralised Headquarters, are doubtless responsible for some of the failure. These things are evidently susceptible of some improvement or correction in the future. But the main cause of it seems to be something much more intractable. The difficulties inherent in all forms of Communist production, or what passes for Communist in Soviet Russia, are particularly acute in the case of agriculture. Piece-rates, as a stimulus to conscientious work, have been applied to the land as they have to Soviet industry. But, however, the rates are graded, they can hardly be an effective substitute for the personal incentive of the small-holder. Improved agricultural methods and more mechanisation are much more than cancelled out by the diminishing

individual output of labour; and whatever propaganda may induce the industrial worker to do, it seems scarcely possible that the "Collectivised" agricultural labourer will agree, for long, to do more work than he is compelled to, unless it pays him to do it; and to compel him, given the huge areas and numbers involved, seems to be proving an impossibility.

The Communists themselves have reacted to the crisis in a characteristic way. Last summer, they tried a Rightward move, and by way of concession to the Peasants, issued a series of Decrees authorising them to sell their surplus on the Private Market. But this has had no effect, perhaps mostly because the Peasants had little or no surplus. In any case, the Kremlin has now swung back to the Left, and is trying a fresh dose of Terror; arrests, executions without trial, and the rest of it. But things remain worse than ever.

CHAPTER X

THE FIVE YEAR PLAN

So far as the Communists could contrive to bring it about, the whole of Russia's resources, industrial, financial and agricultural, and one might add mental and physical, were concentrated for nearly four years on the Plan, which began in the autumn of 1928 and ended on the last day of 1932. For the last two years or so the outside world has shown a great deal of interest in it, but even now there is still much misconception of what it really is. In the first place, contrary to a common impression, it does not represent anything new in principle. Planned development is an essential part of Communist economy, and between 1917 and 1928 planning had been partially and tentatively attempted.

Again, upon the completion of the first Five Year Plan, or, to be more precise on the expiration of the time allotted to it, further Plans are to succeed it. The Soviet Press, long before the end of 1932, began discussing the scheme for the next five year period and there was a tendency to treat the present effort as no more than a part

of a much greater scheme covering a stretch of fifteen years. Moreover, another misconception as to the nature of the Plan is prevalent outside Russia. For reasons which will be explained below, the Plan was presented to Russia and thus, indirectly, to the world at large, as a self-contained and integral unit which must be made to "succeed" at all costs. There is, of course, some justification for regarding the Plan from that angle, but this aspect of it is not so important as the Communists would have the Russian people believe. Although in a sense the Plan was a single entity, at the same time it is made up of a series of programmes of development in different directions, not unlike such programmes must be in any State. It follows that even though the results actually achieved at the end of the allotted period may fall short of the Plan figures by twenty, thirty or even more per cent., that part of the programme which *is* achieved will not be lost.

Let us assume, for example, that the Plan provided for the construction of fifty new chemical plants by the end of 1932. In actual fact, it might well have been that no more than thirty-five of these plants were completed by the allotted date. If so, the Plan would not have "succeeded" in this particular respect, but the Soviets would nevertheless have thirty-five more chemical factories than they had in 1928. This consideration

applies to all the many aspects of the Plan, and though it is perfectly true that the progress of any given industry may affect, to a greater or lesser degree, the progress of many others; and that thus the Plan as a whole must to some extent hang together; still it is a mistake to regard its "success" or "failure" as a clear-cut and definite alternative.

The reason for which the Communists misled Russia and, incidentally, the outside world on this point, is a simple one. They dramatised one phase of their economic history under the title of "The Five Year Plan" because an element of tension and drama had to be introduced to catch the imagination of the Russians, and to spur them on to the abnormal effort and self-denial without which the experiment could not proceed. It would have been useless to try to convince their public that if only they would work hard enough, and endure enough privation, the Russian standard of living might perhaps rival America's in a generation's time. But if it would have been a waste of time to ask thirty years' overwork and self-denial from the people, it was quite another thing to call on them for a desperate but short spurt of four years with the promise of great material rewards all round at the end of them.

Whether the Communists really believed that these rewards would begin to materialise by

1933 is another matter. But the fact remains that they made a skilful appeal to the crowd by depicting the Plan as a decisive battle in a vital war; and that from a section of the people, mostly the young, they met with a response which could not but impress the foreigner. At the same time, the foreigner could hardly fail to notice that this section was a small minority, nor could he fail to wonder whether an enthusiasm which sprang up so quickly might not fade equally quickly if things went palpably wrong or merely if their novelty wore off. However this may be, it must be recognised that the Five Year Plan, or rather, perhaps, the Fifteen Year Plan of which it is a part, is a project on the grand scale. It is an attempt at innovation to which the only modern comparison seems to be Japan's change-over from eastern to western forms in the space of less than a generation.

Two things underlie the whole scheme. One is that Russia, even now, is still almost exclusively an agricultural state. The other is that she possesses large resources in almost all the raw materials of modern industry, abundant man-power to work them, and a political system which enables that man-power to be used in any way the State may choose. While Russia remains an agricultural state she must continue to depend on the outside world; but her wealth in raw

materials guarantees that she need not do so if she were to manufacture them herself. If it had been merely an economic question, Russia might have remained indefinitely in the position of exchanging her primary products for the manufactures of the West; or again, she might have chosen the easier and more natural course of improving and developing her main resource, agriculture, while she gradually built up a strong industry alongside it.

But the Bolsheviks have many other things to think of beside pure economics. They are, above all else, the Party of the urban proletariat, and the stronger that that section of the population becomes, as the result of industrial development, the stronger should grow the position of the Communists and the better the prospect of a continuance of their domination. Equally important to them is the "external" factor. The Bolshevik revolution started in the confident hope of an immediate world-revolution. That hope has faded somewhat, but the Bolsheviks never lose an uneasy consciousness of the outside world. Their state of mind seems to oscillate between contempt of all bourgeois civilisation and an almost panic fear of blockade or attack by some European combination. In either state of mind, they saw salvation in the industrial development under the Plan.

From the defensive point of view, the Plan was to make them economically independent of Europe and America and so indifferent to any blockade. At the same time, it was to provide the factories to supply their armies with gas, tanks, guns and shells on a lavish scale. From every point of view, their position would be immensely strengthened. Propaganda abroad having failed them, they saw the possibilities of a Trade offensive. To "Catch up and Surpass" capitalist countries is a catch-phrase that recurs a hundred times a day in Russia. It is, indeed, expressly this that formed the object of the whole Plan. The process of catching up and surpassing is, of course, ostensibly to benefit the Russians themselves in the first place. But no one can begin to understand the Russian revolution unless he grasps the fact that the Communism of the sincere Bolshevik is a fighting creed which requires its adherents to profess and call themselves the enemies of all capitalist civilisation. The Plan has unquestionably added to the Soviets' powers of aggression, even if it does little else.

The Five Year Plan, as has been already remarked, is in itself no more than the first stage of a larger, indeed unlimited, project for the development of industry in particular and Communism in general. This being so, the Communists rightly began at the beginning. They proposed

to develop first, motive power, then heavy industry, and lastly, light industry, in that order. The period 1928-1933, which we know as the Five Year Plan, has been devoted to the first two and their progress was to have been more or less simultaneous. Not more than a beginning was to be made with light industry, except in the case of textiles.

First on the whole list came electric power, to which Lenin attached exaggerated importance. The Dnieprostroy, one of the largest plants in the world, and scores of other generating stations scattered all over the Union, were to raise Russia from an insignificant place on the list to the third largest producer of electric power, behind only the United States and Germany. The oil industry was already doing well, but was nearly to double its output between 1928 and 1933. There is a great deal of coal in the Union and the output was to be more than doubled between 1928 and 1933. Next to power and fuel came transport. The total length of track of the railways was not to be vastly increased, the main object being re-organisation and provision of more rolling-stock. However, the Turksib, a line connecting Siberia with the new cotton fields of Turkestan, has already been laid, and various other new lines, and the doubling of the track on existing routes are on the programme.

Immense effort was to be expended on the iron and steel industries. By 1933, the output of iron and steel was to be considerably more than twice the 1928 figure. The new group of factories at Magnitogorsk, in the Urals, is intended ultimately to be the largest steel plant in the world, and there were to be other undertakings on a great scale. With iron and steel goes machine-producing industry. Among the new units are the Nijni-Novgorod motor factory, planned to produce an hundred thousand cars a year; and the Stalingrad factory with an annual output of fifty thousand tractors. Altogether, the Soviets proposed to invest during the period of the Plan, no less than four thousand million roubles in the metal and machine industries combined. Very large sums were also devoted to the chemical industry, which is to produce fertilisers for the Collective farms, and poison-gas for the Armies. This industry was unimportant until 1928, but by 1933 its capital value was to be nearly quadrupled.

The Plan, in short, involved the expansion of each and every industry, but in varying degrees, the whole emphasis being placed, for the first five-year period, on those which supply producers', as opposed to consumers', goods. The State finances were to be called on in respect of "economic activities" (Industry, Agriculture,

Power, Transport and Housing), for a total of fifty-five thousand million roubles, between 1928 and 1933. In the absence of foreign capital, this sum was to be found by the Soviets as they went along, so to speak. To enable them to do it, an increase in industrial efficiency and a reduction in costs was provided for. The Plan required that wholesale prices should fall by about a quarter. At the same time, real wages were to have risen by 80 per cent. by 1933, while the working day was to be reduced to under seven hours.

This, in the roughest outline, sums up the object of the Plan as drawn up in 1928. As has been pointed out already, the question that is asked so often as to whether the Five Year Plan has "succeeded" or "failed" has really a less exact meaning than would at first sight appear. Even if the Soviets were to fail to accomplish half of their constructional programme, they would actually be far better equipped industrially in 1933 than they were in 1928. But, speaking generally, this is not the real issue. It became evident quite early in the course of the Plan that the Bolsheviks were likely to achieve at least a very respectable percentage of the new construction proposed. But the important question, both for Russia and the outside world, is whether they are, or will be able, to make an effective

use of the mass of new industrial plant which they have erected with foreign help. As the Plan proceeded, it became more rather than less doubtful whether they will be able to do so.

Nevertheless, the question of how much constructional progress has been made is one of considerable interest in itself. But it is one to which, for a variety of reasons, it is very hard to give a precise and comprehensive answer. To begin with, the programme of construction is so large and various that it is difficult for the outsider to get anything like a general view of it. The huge area involved makes it out of the question for one individual to see more than a fraction of it, and, in any case, only an expert in each of the particular industries concerned, is qualified to give an opinion on its technical aspects. Finally, the Kremlin, which is careful to give the fullest publicity to the more spectacular and successful achievements under the Plan, says little or nothing of the failures, or of the projects postponed or abandoned.

When it comes to questions of production and efficiency, as opposed to mere construction of new plant, the issue is further confused by the fact that the Plan, which was originally to have taken five years, was first shortened by a year, and then extended again by three months. In any event, fresh figures and programmes are

got out at the beginning of each year. All this makes it difficult for the outsider to grasp which set of figures is really which. Still worse is the fictitious value assigned to the rouble, which means that there is no standard of reference by which to judge costs, wages, or prices. Finally, there is the discrepancy between principle and practice, between paper and fact, which extends to everything in Soviet Russia. Estimates of the results achieved must thus to no small degree consist of guesses, checked by such facts as are available.

On this admittedly unsatisfactory basis, the conclusion which I personally reached, and which I think many observers would share, is that by the end of 1932 the Communists, in the matter of setting up new industrial plant, reached or even passed the point they had hoped to attain when the Plan was first launched; and that had it not been for an unforeseen factor, they might already have gone further still. But the world depression has hit Russia quite as hard as any other state. It has forced the Bolsheviks to export more of everything exportable than they had counted on, in order to pay for their imports of machinery; and even with this greater volume of exports, the cash realised has been less than the Plan foresaw.

The financial consequences have been serious to Russia. She has, virtually, no invisible exports

and, largely as the result of the fall in commodity prices, she shows an adverse balance of visible trade; dangerously adverse, in fact, given the relatively small total turnover of her foreign trade. This adverse balance she can only cover by extensive short-term credit for which she has to pay very heavily. Her financial position, in consequence, is the reverse of sound. In spite of some restriction of imports and expansion of exports, she still lives from hand to mouth. There is a certain irony in the fact that one of the chief obstacles to the Plan, which was to demonstrate that a Communist economy was superior to and independent of the Capitalist world, should, in fact, have been the continued dependence of the Soviets upon the economics of the Bourgeois States.

But, to return to what has actually been accomplished, the general position seems to be that the more imposing of the new units, those which have a high "news" value, have made good progress. Undertakings such as the Dnieprostroy, the Turksib Railway, Nijni-Novgorod, and a considerable number of other large-scale works, were duly declared open, up to, or even in advance, of the scheduled date. On the other hand, stories are current of many less spectacular undertakings being left half-finished or abandoned. But, as has been emphasised before, this

has for some time ceased to be the real issue. There is quite enough new construction already available to have made the Plan very much a going concern, if other factors were favourable. The main problem is now one of output and not of building.

It must be remembered, in this connection, that the new industrial construction is by no means exclusively a Russian achievement. There are, certainly, plenty of factories which the Russians have built, or are still building, for themselves, though even these probably are equipped mainly with imported machinery. But, at the critical points of the "Industrial Front"—the Communist delights in military analogies at all times, especially when referring to the Plan—the aid of foreigners is generally called in. There have been, from first to last, several thousand foreign engineers and foremen employed in connection with the Plan, and as agricultural advisers. The majority have been Americans, though there are now relatively few of them left. Next to the Americans, in point of numbers, come the Germans. To take only three cases, the Dnieprostroy, Stalingrad, and Nijni-Novgorod, which together are fairly representative of the more ambitious side of the Plan, were mainly or wholly of American design and under American direction.

This leads one to reflect that it is one thing to spend the proceeds of exported raw materials on hiring expensive foreign experts to instal brand-new foreign machinery in freshly-erected factories; and quite another thing to work those factories economically and efficiently after the foreigners have gone home. The Bolsheviks, of course, had no choice but to learn from someone; and they chose the Americans, by whose methods they are, or were, deeply impressed. But the question remains: can Russians work American machinery, on American lines, with anything approaching American efficiency? For the present, at least, the answer must be that they cannot. The Russian workman, though he has his good qualities, may fairly be described as lazy and irresponsible; while the Soviet régime, for a variety of reasons, has not succeeded in producing in any adequate numbers the qualified professional experts necessary to run its own industry.

It would be ridiculous to expect a Western European standard from what its authors themselves describe as an experiment; an experiment, moreover, conducted in unfavourable conditions and which, in any case, is only fifteen years old, at the longest reckoning. But, all allowances being made, and in spite of its impressive scale, the modernity of its new technical

equipment and the large increase in a number of forms of production already achieved, the Plan, looked at comprehensively from the point of view of nett results obtained, seems to have come much nearer to complete failure than to complete success.

The stumbling-block has been the human element. The plan was started and kept going by a very vigorous and wide-spread propaganda. The Russians were called on for a tremendous effort to last four years, and every artifice was used to add force to the appeal. On the whole, the appeal was generously answered and particularly by the young whose fancy was caught and, for that matter, was held, at least until quite lately. But almost from the first there was apparent something hectic and unnatural in the atmosphere. The Plan has, throughout, rested to no small extent on the efforts of the "shock-workers", mostly young men, who pledge themselves to work to the very limit of their capacity regardless of wages, conditions, and other such mundane considerations; and, so far as they can, to inspire the rest to do likewise. The energy and the faith displayed by these young "shock-workers" was the most impressive thing the Revolution has produced.

Some of the devices introduced by the Communists to keep up a sense of excitement and tension

in industry strike the foreigner as very unlike what would appeal to his own countrymen. Some years ago, for instance, they introduced what was known as "Socialist Competition", in which one factory or one shift challenged another to a contest in increasing production, reducing absenteeism, and the like. It is a good instance of the Communist version of "The Public School Spirit", but it is a game which would hardly commend itself, perhaps, to most English Trade Unionists, whose sense of humour would be outraged by it. A more advanced form of it was for the employees of a particular factory or industry, on learning the official quota of production assigned to them under the Plan, to make a "Counter-Plan" of their own, providing for still higher output and efficiency. According to the Soviet Press, moreover, there were many cases in which these "Counter-Plans" were actually realised.

But unless the outsider once again fails to understand Russia, the day of these somewhat simple propagandist devices is now long past. Undoubtedly they owed their success to something real and strong; the belief of great numbers of industrial employees that they were really working, as the Communists assured them they were, in their own interests and the interests of their Class. Now, it seems that they have begun

to realise that this is not so, and that they are working for a State machine which is not only radically inefficient in itself, but is driven by economic facts to an unscrupulous disregard of the interests of those on whose behalf it claims to exist; a State which has no principle other than to keep itself going as best it may.

The Communists themselves seem either unconsciously or deliberately, to have accepted this as inevitable. As long ago as the spring of 1931, they shifted their ground away from their earlier appeal to a proletarian "Public School Spirit" towards something more realistic. Since then, the idea of wage-inequality has been officially elevated almost to a sacred principle. However the Party's spokesmen, from Stalin downwards, may try to explain away, or to justify this, it amounts to a direct negation of the original spirit of Communism as it was understood by the crowd. Piece-rates, generally more sharply graded than in the Bourgeois States, are now the official rule, insisted upon not only in industry but actually on the Collective farms. The piece-rate system, like the Conveyor-Belt, used to be denounced by Communists as a crying iniquity under Capitalism. Both are now a source of official self-satisfaction in Soviet Russia. Inequality of wages, in fact, is in a fair way to become the leading characteristic in Russian

economy. The necessity for it is constantly urged by official speakers and publicists.

Moreover, it is now not merely a question of differentiation in wages. The principle is applied, nowadays, to the individual not only as a producer but as a consumer. To meet and, incidentally, to emphasise, the conditions produced by differentiated pay, the Communists have introduced a differentiated scale of prices for articles of consumption. At the bottom of the price list come the ordinary State and Co-operative shops. Next above these come what are called commercial shops, which sell the same articles of food, etc., but at much higher prices; more expensive again is the Private Market, now officially tolerated; and, lastly, there is an organisation known as Torgsin, which accepts payment only in foreign currency, or in gold, or its equivalent. This last-named organisation was originally designed for the use of foreigners, but is now also resorted to by those Russians who may chance to have the necessary "valuta".

Given the prevailing goods-famine, the chief characteristic of this scale of prices, of course, is that the supply of goods available for purchase varies with their cost. The cheapest goods are sold out first, and only the individual who can pay the higher price, has much chance of getting what he wants. Needless to say, the higher-paid

section of the community can best afford the higher rates, and though what they can buy is of no better quality than the rest, they still benefit disproportionately in that they suffer less from the chronic shortage of almost every article of consumption. The "rich" in Soviet Russia thus have a double pull over the "poor". The Communists are far from fools, and it is not to be supposed that they have permitted or rather brought about this state of things accidentally. Its effect must be, indeed actually is, to revive the old economic disparities, but between newly-formed or re-formed classes. One can only conclude that the Communists decided that this process was essential to the Plan, and determined to sacrifice all other considerations to it. But it is certainly a far cry from all that the proletarian must once have imagined Communism and the Plan to mean for him.

One of my objects in this book is to exclude columns of statistics. In any event, Soviet figures—and there are no others—on the progress of the Plan, are widely published and are available to everyone. But the impression conveyed by these figures is not the impression gained by the average foreigner who stays in Russia long enough to look a little beneath the surface. As has been said before, new construction has probably fulfilled the original hopes of 1928, but

the real results of it—by which I mean the answer to an imaginary sum in which the number of new factories might be multiplied by their output, and the total cost, moral and material, subtracted from the product—is a very different matter. The gross output of heavy industry has, indeed, risen greatly. But it has risen at a prohibitive cost in human effort; that is to say, a cost so high that it seems destined to prohibit the carrying on of the scheme in its present form for more than a limited time.

Agriculture, by far the most important of Russian industries, has been discussed already. It is hardly overstating the case to say that the Communists have here failed decisively. An exception must be made, however, of the Export Timber Trade. Given the good quality and the enormous extent of the supply of raw material and the abnormal labour conditions which are exceptionally favourable to the Soviets from the point of view of cost, this industry seems likely to be able to compete successfully in almost any market, if no special measures are taken against it by importing States. Oil production, again, must be reckoned a Communist success. The output of existing fields has been largely increased, and it would seem that the industry is run with an efficiency above the Russian average. Moreover, if their recent claims are justified,

the Communists have had a remarkable stroke of luck in discovering last year what may prove a very large and rich new field south of the Urals.

It is of some interest to note, in passing, that even if the export of grain declines, as appears very likely, the Bolsheviks would still be able to rely on a large margin of timber and oil for export purposes. These two industries seem to represent the main Bolshevik successes under the Plan. Officially, of course, they maintain that all their industry has developed with a success beyond their own hopes. But, to the outsider, oil and timber alone seem to be solid assets. For the rest, the Communists appear to have miscalculated seriously in not allotting, in the first instance, more money and effort to the transport system. The railways have never actually broken down, as has been suggested from time to time in the foreign press, but they are patently ill-equipped and inefficient and they act as a heavy drag on Soviet industry as a whole.

The production of Coal, Iron and Steel is, in the nature of things, the basis of the present Plan, and of the whole Communist experiment. Here, the position is unsatisfactory, and particularly in the case of coal. Production of coal and iron has risen very considerably, but in

neither case has it approximated to the rate planned. In fact, the rates of output began last year ominously to decline, not only relatively, but absolutely. In the case of coal the figures of production rose to a maximum by the end of '31, but by August of 1932 had fallen back to a level below that of eighteen months earlier, and the figures for pig iron, as well as for steel, seem to have followed a more or less parallel curve. Whether this phenomenon is merely a temporary one, or whether it is the result of intractable factors with which the Communists will not be able to cope, still remains to be proved. In any case, it has had a most unfavourable effect on the large new industrial undertakings which the outsider would be apt to regard as typical of the whole Plan.

Besides an uncertain supply of raw material, made more uncertain by transport congestion, there is a lack of organising ability and particularly of skilled supervision and labour. One result is a quite inadequate output from most of the large-scale new enterprises. The story of Nijni-Novgorod, for example, has been one of over-hasty construction; a premature opening for propagandist reasons; an intermittent and spasmodic output followed by closing down for varying periods. And this, in a greater or less degree has been the story of several of the large

new enterprises. Equally serious, from the point of view of the Plan, is the fact that the quality of the final product is in most cases very low, and that the tendency seems to be definitely downwards. I have already emphasised that it is a mistake to regard the Plan as one integral and indivisible whole. Nevertheless, it is obvious that a failure in one branch of industry must necessarily tend to disorganise the rest, and this is unquestionably what happened in the Russia of 1932.

But apart from industry proper, there are other angles from which the Plan may be looked at in an attempt to assess its real progress. First, there is its financial aspect. The Plan was to make Russia financially stable and independent, both internally and externally. It has already been noted that so far as her external commercial relations are concerned, Russia's financial position is unsound, if not precarious. Nor does the internal position seem to offer any very solid ground for self-satisfaction, in spite of the confident assertions of official Bolshevik apologists. A very favourite resort of the Communists is to call attention to astronomic sets of figures which they represent as "Socialist Investment" already made.

These figures are doubtless compiled on some consistent theoretical basis. But, to a layman, the

whole essence of an investment is the return on the capital invested; in short, the dividend. It is not only difficult, but quite impossible, to assess in terms of normal finance what precise return the Soviet State is getting, or is likely to get, from its large investments in new industrial plant. But no one with any claim to common sense would maintain that a unit such as Nijni-Novgorod was paying the Communist equivalent of five per cent., or that there was any immediate likelihood of its doing so. If this is also true of Soviet industry as a whole as I believe most reasonable observers would conclude that it is, Soviet claims to enormous capital investments in the last four years are meaningless. A Communist State, just like a Bourgeois individual, must in the end reckon not the capital laid out but the effective return on it. It is idle for the Communists to show, say, a tractor factory as an asset of fifty million pounds on the credit side of their national balance sheet, if that factory cannot produce useful tractors at a reasonable cost. Sooner or later, its nominal capital value must be written down to correspond with its effective yield. For the present, at any rate, if this process were applied to Soviet industry a true balance-sheet of the Plan would show the most catastrophic loss.

Admittedly it would be quite unreasonable to apply such a test to the whole Soviet experiment

at the present juncture. Even the soundest concerns may fail to show a profit in their early days. But the point is whether the Plan, or rather the Plans that are to succeed it, are likely or not to develop a greater degree of efficiency than has been attained as yet. There are several factors at work which should make for improvement. For one thing, if even the present degree of industrialisation is maintained, a larger number of reasonably skilled men should, automatically, become available. In the same way, the Soviet education system will presumably continue to turn out numbers of half-trained technicians; but these, in course of time, will have supplemented their inadequate training by practical experience.

But other and powerful factors, which might be summed up as growing disorganisation and weakening faith, seem to be active in the opposite direction. Whether one of these sets of forces will prevail over the other must be a matter of pure surmise. But, for the present, one thing is certain and that is that the Communist's grandiose claims to vast accumulations of capital are pure "bunk".

Lastly, there is yet another angle, and that the most important, from which the Plan should be considered. It must not be forgotten that the Plan was not meant as a mere exercise in economics, but that it was originally claimed that the whole structure with all its ramifications was

to be built up solely in the interests of the working-class. It was to make first Russia and thence the whole world, safe for the Dictatorship of the Proletariate. What the Plan has or has not done for the working-class, therefore, is what it must be judged on. In this respect, the main features of the original Plan were the absorption in new industry only of a given number of recruits, from the land; a sharp rise in the productivity of the individual workman which, in turn, would make possible a substantial reduction in wholesale prices; real wages were to be nearly doubled; and the working-day was to be cut down to less than seven hours.

Of these projects, none has been effectively realised. Soviet industry as a whole actually employed far more workers than had been foreseen, which fact naturally re-acts on the calculations made in regard to the total wages-bill of industry. Individual productivity rose, to begin with, but one must suppose that a good deal of this rise, which incidentally never reached the Plan figure, was due at least as much to imported modern machinery as to any improvement in the personal performance of the individual workman. In any case, the curve of individual productivity seems, now, to have flattened out. The general price level, after a preliminary fall, has risen again and is still rising,

which, again, must affect the basic calculations on which the Plan was worked out.

As to hours of work, the Communists, in the earlier stages of the Plan, tried to introduce so far as possible throughout the whole of industry, the five-day week and a continuous working day of three shifts. For a variety of reasons, this attempt has been largely abandoned and a more normal system has been reverted to. The length of the working-day has undoubtedly been materially shortened in comparison with the Tsarist average, and in this respect the Plan has brought a real gain to the working-class, probably the only tangible gain they can record. It would not be true to say, however, that a general working-day of less than seven hours is now in sight.

But the crux of the matter is the question of the level of real wages, and here Bolshevik assertions are definitely in conflict with reality. They claim not only that the "National Income" is rising fast, but that individual wages also are rising with it. Certainly, wages as expressed in paper roubles have been increased several times in the last three years, by means of a resort to the printing-press, and doubtless the process will be repeated. But the cost of living has, of course, increased at the same time. Even on paper, Communist statisticians can hardly find it easy to make out a convincing case for any

marked rise in real wages; when it comes to facts, it is very evident that there has been no rise, but a fall. Just as the outsider, who is neither a Communist or a statistician, on seeing Soviet figures of "Socialist Investment" under the Plan, asks himself what is the real return on it; so, on reading that the wage level is rising, he makes the simple constatation that the main thing about wages is what a man can buy with them.

The trouble with most Russians in 1932 is not that they have no depreciated, and still depreciating, paper roubles in their pockets, but that this paper money is of so little use to them. In the matter of housing, over-crowding appears to be even worse than before, at least so far as Moscow is concerned, and conditions at the new industrial centres are reported to be very bad in many cases. Queues are as common and as long as ever. Meat, milk, eggs, butter or other fats, and vegetables, are only to be had at irregular intervals, and then probably at the cost of great trouble and expense. The tea and sugar rations, when they are obtainable, are quite inadequate. Clothing is painfully shoddy and ill-made, while boots and shoes are of the worst quality, and there is a great shortage of them. In fact, the position as regards what really matters to the working-class population, namely housing, food and clothes, has become

worse, not better, in the course of the last year, and at the end of the Plan the general standard of comfort is even lower than when it began.

Indeed, events have given a plain answer as to what the Five Year Plan has achieved for the Russian people. When the Plan started, high hopes were encouraged, not only of material prosperity, but of cultural and social betterment. Politically, it was suggested that the Plan would create the Class-less State, and end the Class War. But, actually, the end of the Plan was marked by a phase of renewed coercion in agriculture; in industry by a drastic cutting down of the number of hands engaged, with the result that there is now heavy unemployment; and in politics by a fresh outburst of the Class War, in the form of the Vickers Trial.

Lastly, it has remained for the Bolsheviks themselves unconsciously to furnish a final and decisive commentary on the outcome of their social policy. The end of the Plan practically coincided with the issue of two remarkable Decrees. The first was designed to put an end to the "fluidity" of Labour. It gives power to factory managements to deprive workmen of their ration cards if they absent themselves from work without leave. The loss of a ration-card, of course, threatens starvation. The other Decree has as its object the clearing out of the over-crowded

towns. It sets up a system of "internal" passports. The individual who is not granted one, has to leave, regardless of the fact that he or she has nowhere to go, and no hope of gaining a living in the ruined countryside. Here, again, it is a matter of starvation. These two Decrees really leave no more to be said.

CHAPTER XI

PRIVATE LIVES

EARLIER chapters have consisted mainly of a commentary on some of the political and economic features of the Soviet system. But on the stranger who stays long enough in Russia to get his bearings, it is not politics or economics that make the strongest impression. It is the extent to which Bolshevism has sought to thrust itself into the lives of individual Russians. The Curse which fell upon the unlucky Jackdaw of Rheims was less comprehensive and less inevitable than the mandates and prohibitions which the Party has poured down on the mass of Soviet citizens.

A more fundamental contrast to the English scheme of life could not be conceived. In England, a great many people are inclined to look on politics as a more or less meaningless game played by a few individuals for obscure but probably questionable motives. As for Economics, these may be all very well for the office or the factory, but not a matter of any general interest, still less a subject for enthusiasm, unless dramatised under some such title as Empire Free Trade.

Detachment from these things has not been the mental habit of any particular class, but, in the Marxist jargon, of the English Capitalist, the petty Bourgeois and the Proletarian, alike. Economic stress is fast shaking us out of our indifference. But it is still true that the English in contrast to the Teutons, the Latins, and now the Slavs, for the most part distrust social or political theorization. They do not connect it closely with daily life, and it bores them. Those who run our own Labour Movement have hitherto failed to realise this fully. They have assumed that Trade Union opinion in England has already absorbed all the Marx-and-water put before it and is asking for more. The last General Election showed that such a conclusion is premature, to say the least. The bulk of the followers of the Labour Party are not as yet Socialists but still Radicals, a very different thing.

But to return to the point; in direct contrast to our habit in this country, all things, great and small, in Soviet Russia, have since 1917 been subordinated to a single politico-economic theory, a fact which is especially curious to the stranger with an English background. He asks himself how an entire people could have been expected to endure to live from birth to death in conformity with instructions from above; and whether in exchange for such material things the State

might choose to allot to them, they could ever willingly have resigned freedom of individual choice and taste in their work and their play; their religion and their art, their house, their food, their clothes, their everything. For, of course, it would be in the direction of more complete and more general standardisation in all things, and thus, of necessity, less and less scope to the individual, that Communist economics would certainly move if ever the Bolsheviks were able to apply them in a pure form. But it has now become very doubtful if they ever will be able to do so, or even if they any longer wish to.

However this may be, Communist theory has already had profound practical results on Russian society, in more than one way. Among the more individual or personal aspects of human life, at least in Western Europe, is the religious one. The Bolsheviks, perhaps because this is so, have made all forms of religion the object of a sustained attack. Karl Marx, of course, in accord with his mid-Victorian mental environment, was an uncompromising atheist. It was he, not Lenin, as is generally supposed, who was the author of the much-quoted phrase "Religion is the Opium of the People". Before the Revolution, the Bolsheviks contended against religion in general and the Orthodox Church in particular, because

they saw it as a hindrance to successful Revolution. In 1909, Lenin wrote:

"The roots of religion to-day are to be found in the social oppression of the masses, in their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible pain and suffering to the workers, than any disaster like war or earthquake. 'Fear created the Gods'; fear of the blind forces of capitalism, blind because they cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people, forces which at every step in the lives of the proletariat and the small trader threaten to bring, and do bring 'sudden', 'unexpected', 'accidental', disaster and ruin, converting them into beggars, paupers or prostitutes, or condemning them to starvation."

In other words, religion was originally to be fought because in teaching patience and resignation it checked the sense of exasperation which the Revolutionaries were trying to arouse.

With the progress of the Revolution, Capitalism as a fear-inspiring menace to the security of the Workers should have disappeared. But the Communist campaign against all forms of religion has continued. The Communists have changed their arguments but not their purpose. For one

thing, the idea of some form of personal human relationship with God, common to Christianity and Islam, is too individualistic to be really compatible with the Communist scheme of life. But the real point is that if Communism is ever to be fully accepted by the people, it is essential that every other interpretation of life should first have been removed from their mental reach. "Thou shalt have none other Gods but Me," says the Communist, and he calls in the G.P.U. to see to it that it shall be so.

Few things about the Revolution can have been more surprising to the foreigner who knew Tsarist Russia than the rapid collapse of the Orthodox Church, even granted the strength of the attack on it. But after the event it is not difficult to see some of the causes of its weakness. The Orthodox ceremony is more dignified and impressive, perhaps, than any other form of human ritual. But the Church was compromised by too close an association with the Tsar's administration, of which it was practically a Department. It offered the people little ethical teaching; it made small effort to better social conditions; to discourage the drunkenness and brutality that are Russian failings, or to promote popular education. Its whole attitude, in fact, was reactionary and obscurantist.

Moreover, not a few of the Church's practices

would be dismissed by a more advanced community as somewhat primitive magic. Such things as the miracle-working relics exploited by the monasteries, or the ceremonial Blessing of the peasants' cows, a proceeding too often demonstrably ineffective, gave the Communist an excellent mark for derision, of which he availed himself to the full. Whatever the causes, the Orthodox Church has shown itself less resistant to the Bolshevik attack than the Protestant sects, or than Islam. The Baptists, indeed, in face of exceptional persecution, are said to have made converts and still more or less to hold their own.

In the early days of the Revolution and the Civil War, the Bolsheviks relied largely on violence against the Church, as against all their opponents. An unknown, but certainly a very large number of Priests, were shot along with the innumerable officers, officials, bourgeois, and their families who were put to death in the years which followed 1917. Of late years, however, direct violence has in the main given place to economic pressure and attack by propaganda.

Priests were officially placed in the category of the "Lichentsi"—the Disenfranchised. A person in this category could not vote. This in itself is of small consequence in Russia, but those who may not vote may not belong to Trade Unions, and are not issued with Ration Cards. This

meant that the Priests had to rely on the Private Market where supplies were uncertain and prices often fantastically high. The lot of the Priest would thus in any event be a hard one and it was often made harder by the fact that he was prohibited by the authorities from living within two miles of a town.

Again, the Priest's source of income was cut off. Church Revenues disappeared long since and the Priest had to rely on what his congregation could scrape together for him. In the Provinces, subscriptions came mainly from the better-to-do peasants, but the anti-Kulak campaign has swept these away. The elimination of the Kulaks, with the spread of the Communist-run Collective farms, has meant the disappearance of many, or most, of the surviving village Priests and the closing of many more village churches. By economic pressure alone, therefore, the Soviets have made the conduct of any organised religion difficult. The private individual, it is true, is within his legal rights in attending a religious service, provided always that the congregation to which he belongs, and the church which he attends, is properly registered. But if he is a man occupying anything like a responsible post, or indeed if he has anything to lose, he would be likely to lose it by doing so. The practice of religion is, of course, out of the question for a

member of the Party, and it is suspect to the authorities in anyone else.

The Soviet Constitution lays down that in the Union there shall be freedom of Religious Belief, and of anti-religious propaganda. This rather curiously worded clause was adopted about ten years ago and has been fully exploited by the Communists. Religious belief, provided it is passive, is permitted. It could not be otherwise. But the practice of religion is hindered so far as possible. All religious congregations must be licensed or registered, and the elaborate regulations governing this process give the local authorities wide powers. It is open to them, for instance, to impose such taxation on the churches as the congregation cannot hope to pay. Again, a church may be closed or turned over to some secular use, if a resolution to this effect is passed by a local assembly. Since, in Russia, resolutions so passed on whatever subject, may well have nothing to do with the sentiments of the majority, the authorities have had little difficulty in closing a church as soon as they think it prudent to do so.

Religious belief is legal, but religious "propaganda" is not. A man may join in common worship with the registered congregation of which he is a member, (provided, of course, the congregation is left a church in which to worship)

but he may not attempt to propagate his beliefs outside. In particular, it is forbidden to give religious instruction to anyone under the age of eighteen years. On the other hand, propaganda against all forms of religion is not only legal, but is the accepted policy of the State. The outside world has heard a good deal of the Atheist Society, the semi-State organisation whose business it is to lead the anti-religious campaign. This Society maintains museums, publishes periodicals and literature, and supplies speakers for appropriate public meetings. Its most conspicuous activity, however, is the issue of posters and cartoons. Some few of these are comparatively restrained in sentiment, or of a certain artistic merit; but these are the exception. The vast majority are crudely scurrilous, their theme being that all Churches are in the pay of the Capitalists; or, more simply, that Russian priests are always drunk.

Particular attention used to be paid to propaganda among the Trade Unions. Competitions in securing converts to Atheism were organised, prizes offered for apt items of propaganda, and so on. Special efforts were made to counteract the surviving influence of festivals such as Easter and Christmas. On such occasions the Trade Unions used to be directed, among other things, to organise processions and "Anti-Religious Sports

and Games" as a counter-attraction. I remember trying to find out what an anti-religious sport was like, but I was not successful. The activities of the Atheist Society and the Trade Unions, however, are only incidents in a general assault. The Party resolved to suppress all organised religion and with its habitual thoroughness it has used its many-sided power of control to this end.

For the present, the campaign is not one of special violence, doubtless because the Kremlin is satisfied with the results already being achieved. In any case, it can afford to go slowly, as the word slow is interpreted in Russia, seeing that it controls the whole educational machine. This control ensures that a bias against religion shall be implanted in the minds of all the present and future generations of young Russians, a bias that is developed as the boy or girl passes through the Pioneer organisation and into the Komsomol. The Communists doubtless feel that all this ensures them a decisive advantage and that, for the present at least, no exceptional measures are required.

The question of how far the Bolsheviks' anti-religious campaign has succeeded, is a difficult one to answer. So far as the large towns are concerned, it would seem that the Communists have in the main achieved their purpose. On

the surface at least, little or nothing of religion survives. I have never seen any official figures, but something like three-quarters or more of the churches in Moscow and Leningrad are now closed and the congregations which attend those that remain open appear to be small and composed of elderly people. The younger generation seems to be either indifferent or hostile to Christianity, or at any rate to the Orthodox Church. In the country, as has been remarked already, a Church and a Kolkhoz can hardly exist indefinitely side by side, and if the Kolkhoz survives it would seem that the Church must disappear.

If, in western Europe, enlightened opinion has come in the last century or so to regard an individual's views on religion as essentially his own personal affair, there has also been a tendency to leave men and women to conduct their relationships with each other more and more in the light of their own consciences. In England, for instance, public opinion on such questions as Divorce and Contraception is far in advance not merely of the contemporary ecclesiastical view, but of the Law itself, to a point at which a Divorce Court Judge, for example, is at times hard put to it to prevent the administration of the existing code from becoming a farce. But if there has been some change in public opinion

here and in America, in Soviet Russia there has been a wholesale sweeping away of standards accepted elsewhere. The foreign observer is immediately struck by the Soviet Marriage Laws, not only because they imply great innovations in social organisation, but because, at first sight, they seem to conflict with all the rest of Communist theory by conferring on the individual not less, but more, freedom of choice and action than he or she had under the old régime.

As a matter of fact, this last impression is really a mistaken one. The purpose of the Communists in loosening the tie of marriage is not to allow more initiative to the individual, but to weaken the influence of the Family, a form of human relationship which Communist propaganda has hesitated to condemn openly, but which it rightly regards as an obstacle to the full realisation of its own scheme of life.

The theoretical Communist view of sex is, like everything else Communist, based on a crude materialism. That ideas such as Chastity, Chivalry, Constancy, or the like, need ever influence the attitude of a man to a woman, or vice-versa, is dismissed as bourgeois-religious obscurantism. Romance is an undesirable bye-product of degenerating Capitalism, and so forth. The sexual act, says the Communist, has only two aspects worthy of notice, the physiological, and the

social. It does not differ in essentials from the cognate human functions of eating and drinking. The citizens of the Union must eat and drink in order to live and work; and they must unite in order to produce a new generation to live and work in their turn. That is all there is about it, concludes the Communist, and any superfluous embroidery on this plain truth is distracting and mischievous. To impress this view on the people, the first thing to do is to clear away any sense of mystery or romance which may cling round the question of sex, particularly in the minds of the young, and the propaganda machine is set to do this. The stranger in Moscow is at first somewhat taken aback by the coloured diagrams and plaster casts prominently displayed in shop windows and elsewhere. They illustrate the processes of childbirth, the symptoms and the results of venereal disease, and so on, with a detail and completeness which we associate only with medical textbooks.

It should be added that pictorial propaganda of this sort is by no means confined to matters of sex, but is used to spread ideas of elementary hygiene of all kinds, and it does seem to have contributed to an improved standard in many directions. The mortality rate, and particularly the infant rate, though still high, has been substantially reduced. There appears to be less

drunkenness, and less prostitution. The Communists claim that venereal disease is less prevalent. Stories are current, on the other hand, whether true or not I do not know, of enormous figures for syphilis at the new industrial centres. But, on the whole, the Bolsheviks have undoubtedly succeeded in raising the standard of health and they should be given full credit for it. Their methods, indeed, are apt to shock western susceptibilities. To see a party of boys and girls, for instance, being conducted round a species of medical museum attached to a maternity clinic, at first gives one a sensation of disgust. But young Russians seem to take instruction of this kind with complete seriousness, and, as I have already mentioned, the results on the national health seem, on the whole, to be good.

Another leading tenet of the Communists is that there must be as much political and economic equality between man and woman as may be, and they have done their best to make this equality as real as they can. Western Europe has heard a good deal of the Maternity regulations for women industrial workers, and of the crêches attached to large factories at which the mother can leave her child while she works her shift. The crêche system, with which only a start has yet been made, is likely to be developed as extensively as the Bolsheviks can contrive, because

it accords well with the basic Communist objective of weakening the individualistic influence of the Family and of strengthening the State's hold on the child at an early and plastic age.

Unexpectedly enough, what seem to have been sincere efforts of the Bolsheviks to raise the status of women have, till now, produced no great apparent result except in the Moslem areas. So far as current politics are concerned, women probably exert less influence than they did in the early days of the Revolution. Except for Madame Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, who enjoys a special position in spite of her disapproval of Stalin, only a few women are prominent. This is the more surprising since the Russian woman seems to possess more than her share of the race's energy and intelligence. To the Westerner, she often seems a much better "man" than her brother or her husband. Economically, the present drive for efficiency at all costs and the piece-rate system, tend to put women at a further disadvantage. Educationally, on the other hand, woman have probably made up relatively more ground than men.

The ideas briefly suggested above, namely, sex equality, mistrust of the ideas of the Family and the all-pervading Marxist materialism, together go to dictate the Communist attitude towards marriage. As a permanent tie, it has

been abolished. The registration of a union between a man and a woman which, incidentally, can be cancelled at any time by either party to it without the other's knowledge or consent, is not a binding contract but a civic act for the statistical and legal convenience of the authorities. For all the State cares, men and women may change partners as often as they please. The individual must, in practice, show some discretion in the matter, since excessive promiscuity may be taken as indicating a lack of seriousness and social purpose, and so excite the disapproval of the Trade Union or the Party.

The whole emphasis of the system is upon the welfare of the child, not on the relations of its parents. Abortion is recognised in Soviet Russia, and an expectant mother, if she can produce a certificate from some competent authority, to show that there is a good reason, economic or other, why she should not have a child, may claim to be operated upon free at a State hospital. But once the child is born, the parents are held responsible to the full. In doubtful cases, the Court decides which parent shall have the custody of the child, and the amount which each shall contribute to its upkeep. There is no such conception as illegitimacy. It makes no difference from the child's point of view whether the union of his parents was registered or not; or, indeed,

from that of his parents either. Originally, in cases of doubt, it was open to the mother of a child to name any number of possible fathers up to six. But this provision led to such abuse that it was rescinded, and it is now the duty of the Court to decide the child's paternity, within a few alternatives, and decree the respective contributions to its support accordingly.

The Communists, in short, have endeavoured to change very radically the ideas of Russian men and women on what should be their relations with each other; and certainly they have brought about great changes, particularly in the post-revolutionary generation. Nevertheless, or so it seemed to me, the bias of humanity towards more or less permanent monogamy is showing itself very resistant to contrary influences. Western Europe, perhaps, begins to question whether any such bias exists, but the trend of things in Russia seems to suggest that not only does it exist, but that it is decisive. The figures of "divorce"—that is to say the ratio of unions cancelled to those officially registered, was very high in the early days of the Revolution. People doubtless felt that a general licence was the only thing appropriate to the times. But for the last five years or more the figure has showed a decline until now, I was informed, it is comparable to that of some of the United States.

Admittedly, no too sweeping a generalisation should be based on this. The figure takes no account of unregistered unions; five years or so is too short a time on which to base any definite conclusion; and, in any case, the attitude of the younger generation has not yet produced its full effect. But I remember asking a Russian what he thought about it. He answered that men and women were finding it "too much trouble" constantly to change partners, and that unions were tending to become more lasting. Habit, in fact, was still the strongest thing in the world, and marriage was one of the strongest habits. If my informant was right the new marriage law, even if it remains unchanged, may thus have a less profound effect on Russian society than might have been expected. It is perhaps of interest to note that Stalin himself, until ugly stories began to circulate in connection with the death of his wife, had the reputation of being a very domestic character.

But if it has till now resisted pretty well the abolition of marriage as a permanent tie, the Russian Family has been severely shaken by an impact from another side. Like other Revolutionary movements, the Soviet experiment draws its strength largely from the enthusiasm of the young. Those who can look back beyond 1917, mostly either distrust the new ideas, or detest

them. This in itself makes for a breach between the old and the young; between parents and children; a breach which the Communists do nothing to repair. Communist theory sees no merit in affection between parents and children, since the whole allegiance of every individual, young or old, should be to the State and its economic progress. As a Communist poet put it:—

“The Factory is my Father; the Party Branch
my Home,
My Family is my books, my labour, and my
Comrades.”

This is the teaching poured into the ears of the Komsomol, and much of it has doubtless been absorbed. One story will serve to illustrate the tension it may generate. In a provincial town, a couple of years ago, there lived an artisan and his wife. There was a daughter of fifteen and a new-born child. The girl was a Komsmolka, a member of the League of Communist Youth, and her old-fashioned mother disapproved strongly of her “goings-on” with the Comrades. Remonstrance having failed, the mother tried to keep the girl at home by locking her in. At this the girl decided that she too would act, and she denounced her mother to the local authorities as a “class-enemy”. The authorities,

fully sympathetic, put the mother in gaol. But there was still the baby, and the father was given leave to take it to the prison in order that its mother might feed it. This he did. But the mother had already lost her reason from horror of what she looked on as her daughter's treachery. Instead of feeding the baby, she dashed out its brains against the wall. The father walked home and got out a revolver with which he killed first his daughter and then himself.

Whether or not the details of this story are accurate, there is nothing improbable in it. Melodrama of the kind may be rare, but more common-place family tragedies have been numberless. In the Proletarian State a bourgeois taint is, or was, a grave handicap to young men or women, however wholehearted they might be, or pretend to be, in their acceptance of the Soviet system. Sometimes they were, so to speak, forgiven their origin, but on the condition (it was exacted in the case of children of Kulaks, for example), that they should renounce their parents and all their parents' works. Notices, which reminded one of the announcements in our own Press to the effect that Mr. Jones will no longer be responsible for Mrs. Jones' debts used to be inserted in the Soviet papers to the effect that the children disclaimed all further connection with their father and mother.

Another, and unexpected, factor which operates in Russia to change the old family and, for that matter, all other relationships, is the housing shortage. Apart from the rapid increase of the total population for the last seven years, there has been the drift of the country-people into the towns, stimulated by the hectic industrial development. But the Plan allocated little money or man-power for such a secondary object as housing, unless it happened to be directly necessary for the accommodation of labour for new factories. In Moscow, for instance, the population has increased by some two-thirds, but the total housing space remains much about what it was in 1914. The result is extreme overcrowding. There is little privacy, and no comfort. Kitchens, bathrooms where they exist, and lavatories, have of necessity to be shared among too many people.

House Committees, dear to the Communist mind, direct the affairs of each building, and the whole of life in them tends to take on a semi-public character. These things are the immediate consequence of lack of space. But the minimising of privacy was part of the Communist scheme. Outstanding features in the new buildings planned or finished, are communal kitchens, wash-houses, restaurants, and so on.

The Communist frankly wished to produce something as much like a beehive or an ant-heap

as he could. The Soviet citizen who already worked and produced communally, was to live communally and be amused communally. With mass-production on an unheard-of scale were to go, in due course, vast tenements for mass-accommodation, with mass-recreation, mass-amusements, and mass-culture, for a mass-mentality. It was a flat and dreary prospect.

To the bourgeois foreigner, in fact, dreariness is the leading characteristic of Soviet Russia. The central plain is a flat expanse of clay, with sandy patches, dotted here and there with clumps of birch and fir, and crossed by slow-winding, muddy, rivers. It is a depressing country. Holland and the Argentine are equally flat, but Great Russia has nothing of the different charm of either. Leningrad, seen from the Neva, is as beautiful a town as there is. But a closer view emphasises only its dilapidation and decay. Moscow, with its peeling paint and falling stucco, is everywhere shabby and in places frankly sordid. The wooden villages of the countryside are dirty and unbeautiful. Much of the new industrial construction, hastily run up, is inevitably hideous. The everyday life of the average Russian can have but few glimpses of beauty in it. Whatever it might have been in other minds and hands, Bolshevism as it is is an ugly creed. Daily life, with its over-crowding and its discomfort;

its waiting in queues or jostling in markets for a scant supply of poor food and clothing is an unlovely business. So, unhappily, it is for an unemployed Englishman and his family in Lancashire or Durham. But even they are much better off materially than the great mass of Russians; and in Russia it is not a matter of fifteen per cent. or so of the population, but of almost all of it.

Some of the changes in the every-day life of the Russian already brought about by Communist theories may prove to be permanent; but others may not. It must be remembered that the whole emphasis of Communism is on the economic side of things. The Bolshevik policy towards religion, sex, the Family, and so on, is really no more than a bye-product of their central doctrine, which is economic. Since the Revolution entered on its latest phase, its main economic principles themselves seem to be in process of being changed or discarded, and if these are eventually to be thrown overboard, all the rest may well go with them.

CHAPTER XII

ENGLAND AND RUSSIA

WHAT matters to us in this country is whether Russia is going to affect our own fortunes, political or economic. If there are useful lessons to be learned from the Bolshevik system, we ought to learn and apply them. If Russia is going to compete successfully with us commercially, or if she is likely to offer us a great export market, we ought at least to inform ourselves in advance, so far as we can.

As to whether we have anything to learn from Russia, it is already possible to make some answer. By now, that is the spring of 1933, the Communists have made their effort in the shape of the Plan. In the four years since 1928, they have gone the limit in propaganda and coercion, and it is difficult to see what more they could have done, or could do now, in these directions. They have succeeded to an extent which many sensible people, four years ago, would have reckoned unlikely. They have done so mainly by means of their system of forced exports, in buying enough foreign material and foreign advice

to set up all the apparatus for new industrial production on a very large scale. But, so far, they have failed to make that apparatus work with even the most mediocre degree of efficiency.

If the foreigner comes to this conclusion, he naturally asks himself what is the reason for this failure. I, personally, believe that the main cause of it is the most obvious one conceivable; namely, that a Communist form of production does not work efficiently, or at any rate does not work efficiently for long. An absolute Communism may be, in fact it is, an impressive scheme of life. But it is damned from the start because it refuses to take into account either the strength, or the weakness, of average human nature. In spite of all theories, for most of the people, most of the time, the obvious consideration that men won't work their hardest for nothing still holds good. The vast majority of Russians, as of the rest of us, need some personal incentive, whether in the form of material advantage, or the hope of recognition and reputation.

A pure Communism would aim at ruling out the first absolutely and reducing the second to a minimum. It would assume, in fact, that humanity is capable of the selfless co-operation of a hive of bees or a nest of white ants. But humanity is not capable of it, for the good reason that the instinct, if instinct is the right word,

of the social insects grows on quite another branch of the evolutionary tree to ours, and differs from our own conscious thought, not in degree, but in kind. It is not only that we do not feel the strange mass-impulse which governs an ant-heap, but that our form of mind is incapable of conceiving what it may really be.

The Communists themselves have coined an apt word, "Depersonalisation", which sums up the outcome of trying to graft a non-human theory on to ordinary human nature. Communist theory would have it that everything in Russia belongs to everybody; from which it follows that nothing belongs to anybody in particular. The second of these propositions is, of course, the more easily grasped of the two. The Russian has been told too often that his work is not for himself but for the community, and the result is an attitude of carelessness and irresponsibility towards his job, his machine, his tools, everything. One practical effect of it is that the rates of depreciation of machinery in Russia are often impossibly high.

The main obstacle to the Bolsheviks' economic success would thus seem to be closely connected with the leading idea of Communism itself. But they have another fundamental difficulty to contend with. Given all the circumstances, they cannot do otherwise than centralise the whole

of their system at one point, the Kremlin. But the effect of this inevitable policy is that the Soviet Union is hopelessly over-centralised. Capitalist experience seems to show that Trusts and cartels increase in power and efficiency in proportion to their size and closeness of organisation, up to a certain point; but that beyond that point there is a more or less rapid decline. The whole Union amounts in essentials to a single Trust beside which the largest capitalist unit hitherto organised is quite insignificant in point of size. The vast extent and scope of their organisation has certainly had important advantages for the Communist. But these seem, now, to be outweighed by the disadvantages. Neither the dominant Communist faction, nor in all probability, any other group of men, could run the whole Union effectively. It is altogether too large and too heterogeneous.

Finally, the Russian Bolsheviks in particular, as opposed to Communists in general, have a special problem in the material with which they have to work. In the first place, the prevailing illiteracy and general backwardness which the Bolsheviks inherited from the Tsars, though it has been useful to them in so far as it has made it much easier for them to "put across" their domestic propaganda, becomes a heavy handicap to an attempt to achieve anything like a western

standard of industrial efficiency. Lack of education can be remedied in course of time but, unless the foreigner is mistaken, there is more in it than that. The Russian peasant has not a few admirable qualities, but he does not work very hard or very consistently because it is not "his nature to." Whether a little elementary education will change him is a matter of doubt. It may be that under no system whatsoever would Russia compete successfully with Western Europe.

To the question "What have we to learn from Russia?" I should reply without hesitation, "Nothing." The factors which have made for the Bolsheviks' successes and for their failures alike, are perfectly familiar to us. We know very well, for instance, that a vigorous propaganda can elicit almost any effort from a simple and backward people, for a certain time. We know equally well that an iron discipline, whether applied to an army or to any other organisation, will achieve definite results; and we can see that the Bolsheviks have had absolute powers which they have exercised, unrestrained either by a public opinion, or by the normal scruples of humanity, both over a vast country very rich in natural resources and over the Labour force necessary to exploit them. Finally we know, or we ought to know, that material or organisational assets, however great, sooner or later lose their

value if they are exploited in a way which conflicts with average human instincts. It seems to me that these obvious platitudes sum up the essentials of the whole Bolshevik experiment. If this is so, we have nothing to learn from Russia. We know it already.

In fact, to digress for a moment, the Western European might justifiably express to the Bolshevik surprise, not that so much but that, by western standards, so little had been done in Russia during the fifteen years of the Soviet Power. These fifteen years, after all, have represented a very long time indeed in post-War Europe, whatever they may have done in Russia, and for more than ten of them the Bolsheviks have been in absolute control of everything, great and small. The Communist would reply to this criticism of his achievement by quoting impressive paper statistics on the advance of industrialisation. He would go on to urge that Russia had been immensely handicapped by the War, and the Intervention, as he calls it; and he could point out, with truth, that the Tsars had left Russia in a backward and primitive condition which necessarily has retarded progress.

But the foreigner has only to take a train leaving Russia to have it forcibly suggested to him that these explanations are inadequate. Let us suppose that his journey takes him from Moscow through

Poland, Germany, and Belgium. Each of these countries suffered from the War more severely than Russia. In Germany and Belgium conditions are so very much more advanced that a comparison with Russia would be ridiculous. But in the case of Poland, it is perfectly appropriate seeing that the two States were not separated till the War. No one would maintain that Warsaw represented Western civilisation at its highest level. Yet the impression of contrast produced on the traveller who has spent some months in Russia and who gets off the train to walk round its streets, is remarkable. He feels almost oppressed at the signs of opulence on all sides. Remembering Marxist denunciations of capitalist exploitation, he looks not at the Bourgeois but at the working men and women, and sees them obviously better fed, better clothed and more cheerful than their "comrades" in Moscow.

The impression made on him by Warsaw persists across Europe. By the time the traveller has reached, say, Brussels, he has come to the conclusion that the material development of Russia and the general welfare of her people, would already have been immensely further advanced than it is if the work had been handed over to capitalist enterprise, foreign, native, or both. This conclusion admittedly leaves out of account any moral and spiritual advantages which

the Communist régime might, or might not, have brought to Russia. But, as has been pointed out already, Communism itself is not concerned with these things. It is interested in material development only.

The other important question, as to what are to be Russia's future relations with, or reactions on, this country and the rest of the world, is a much more difficult one to answer. Indeed, any answer is a matter of pure guess-work since it depends on what happens in Russia; and Russia is in a state of flux. It seems in the highest degree unlikely that she could remain indefinitely in her present phase, which appears to be anomalous and unstable. She must either swing back to the Left, or go on swinging to the Right. Present indications suggest strongly that, economically speaking, she will continue along a Rightward path. As I have tried to suggest already, the characteristic of the "Plan Period" was a relatively pure form of Communism, backed by a hectic propaganda, which latter included judicial persecutions ending often in judicial murder under the title of the Class War. But, to judge from the changes of the last year or so, it would seem that the Kremlin regarded the results as inadequate.

No outsider can arrive at what their actual conclusions may have been. But it is as if they

had decided—and, incidentally, decided rightly—that the main obstacle to success was the lack of personal incentive throughout their economic machine. At all events, as if to minimise this defect so far as Agriculture is concerned, they tried, though unsuccessfully, the effect of concessions to the individualist instincts of the peasants. In the same way, as regards industry and administration, they have tried to stimulate individual effort by increasing inequality in wages and standards of living. In spite of official apologies for it, this amounts to a denial of one of the main ideas of the original Communism, and it would seem to imply either a remarkable cynicism on the part of the ruling clique, or else an admission of disillusionment.

The crowd, which had been encouraged to hope for so much by the end of the Plan, can now see for itself that no material rewards for their four-years' effort are to be expected. Even the Russian public must register some disappointment and discouragement on reaching the end of the course, only to find that the winning-post has been moved on some unspecified distance. In these circumstances, the Communists, even if they wished could hardly hope to raise much fresh enthusiasm by their old methods of propaganda, and it is not easy to see what other methods are available.

In any case the differences between the first Five Year Plan, and the new one, which began on January 1st, seem likely to make for some psychological change. The new Plan, for the first time, is to pay some attention to "consumers'", as opposed to "producers'" goods. If this idea is carried into practice, it would mean that individual wants are not only to be recognised officially, but perhaps to become orthodox and respectable. This change in official doctrine, if it really takes place, might encourage a further sense of relaxation. This, in turn, may lead to a decline in output which was anything but satisfactory to begin with. Tendencies of this kind might make necessary more concessions all round, until something like a general retreat to the Right might develop.

But all this, of course, is pure speculation. The one thing which seems reasonably certain is that the present form of government, in name at least, will remain for the present and, probably, for years to come. But this does not necessarily mean very much. The point is not whether the present ruling clique and their successors can maintain a nominal continuity of power, but whether or not an experiment in Communism will be genuinely carried on. The two things are quite distinct. If the unrealities and contradictions of present-day Russia prove anything,

it is that there would be nothing impossible in a Soviet Government, and even a Communist Party, ruling a Russia in which there was nothing Communist. At all events, the present régime seems very secure for the present, provided only it retains the allegiance of the Army and the G.P.U. It has got all the tanks, the armoured cars, and the machine-guns. It has a complete control over all organisations of whatsoever kind throughout the Union, and any concerted opposition to it has long since disappeared.

Moreover, thanks to the Party machine, and particularly to the G.P.U., it is probably the best-informed administration in the world. It is hard to imagine that any serious opposition could develop without the Government receiving the most ample warning, and equally hard to suppose that, having received warning, it would not be able to crush the revolt with ease, provided always that the G.P.U. and the bulk of the Army remained loyal. The Communist oligarchy, in short, is humanly speaking safe from Russian opposition for the present. But there always remains the possibility, perhaps in the long run the certainty, of internal dissension which might have the most far-reaching consequences. The Stalin-Trotsky duel might easily have led to civil war, had things turned out a little differently.

In course of time, some other personal or factional clash must arise.

But, apart from the possibilities of dissension in the Party itself, predictions as to its security of tenure must be qualified in one other important respect. Hitherto, the Party had effectively controlled the Army and the G.P.U., and it does so still. But it is not impossible that some domestic upheaval might occur which would end in the Army, with the G.P.U., controlling—even, conceivably, suppressing—the Party. Historical parallels are risky things but, after all, the thing has happened elsewhere countless times in the past, and there seems to be no reason why it should be impossible, or even improbable, in Russia, if the right conditions arose. But however that may be, these conditions have not arisen at present.

The Red Army is an essential part of the whole Soviet system. But, although recently there seems to have been some indication that the High Command is becoming more politically active, it has hitherto seldom intervened in internal politics.

Nevertheless, the Red Army may play a part of disastrous importance in European history before many years are past. It is of formidable size. Official returns give the strength of the Army and the Air Force as over 560,000 men,

and the number of aeroplanes as 750. There is reason to think either that these figures understate the actual numbers, or that the numbers have increased since the returns were compiled. In addition to the regular Army there are the G.P.U. troops and, in the second line, the militia, which functions as a gendarmerie. Short-term conscription provides a great trained reserve, and behind this again lies Russia's vast population. It is perhaps not generally realised that well over a million young men become eligible for conscription annually.

But it is not the scale of Soviets' military organisation which in itself is the main threat to peace, but rather the spirit of truculence which the propaganda machine has been set to work to inflame. One of its main themes has been to represent Russia as surrounded by a ring of capitalist enemies plotting to crush the Workers' Republic before it grows too strong for them. The Press, in particular, is active in this direction although, regardless of logic, it mixes up its denunciations of the power and aggressiveness of the capitalist world with accounts of its progressive weakening and decay. The bulk of foreign news consists of highly imaginative accounts of strikes and disturbances in capitalist countries or their dependencies. So far as we are concerned, a scuffle between a few police and un-

employed, becomes a bloody riot; a strike is a proletarian mass-upheaval; and if some colonial disturbance should occur, the British Empire is tottering. As for India, only the reactionary Mr. Gandhi stands between the "toiling masses" and the Soviet Republic for which they long.

As a matter of fact, fear of capitalist aggression has been so constantly and earnestly expressed in Russia that one is forced to think that some of it, at least, must be genuine. But it is hard to judge how much of it is real and how much is play-acting for purposes of internal propaganda. It is true that the great majority of the Party is necessarily quite ignorant of the outside world. But there are notable exceptions. Litvinov, for example, the Commissar for International Affairs, is a shrewd man who has a long first-hand experience of England and English conditions. He, for one, must know very well that any great military-economic combination against Russia is a fantastic impossibility in present-day Europe.

One has the impression, indeed that the Soviet Foreign Office does its best to maintain reasonably correct relations with other States, but that it carries little weight with the main stream of Communist opinion which neither knows nor cares anything of the realities of the outside

world. In the same way, the High Command of the Red Army can hardly believe that the General Staffs of a divided, half-bankrupt, and uncertain Europe, would advise the invasion of Russia, an adventure which proved too much for Napoleon and for Ludendorff at the height of their power. The only reasonable conclusion seems to be that the rulers of Russia must have been advised by their experts that attack from outside is not a practical possibility, but that they prefer to keep up the fiction of imminent danger for reasons of their own.

The Red Army is idealised as the saviour of its country. The idea of War, conventionally represented as defensive, is constantly kept in the people's minds, and among the commonest themes in the whole range of propaganda is that the Plan is being threatened by Bourgeois attack from without. One seldom walks far in Moscow without coming across some poster illustrating it.* There are many variations, but generally a Red Soldier of heroic stature is shown standing before a new factory, from which he has repulsed an assortment of "Imperialists". The attackers, to indicate their class-motives, are mostly of the rank of general and highly-decorated. But it is less amusing to note that the uniforms of particular foreign powers are

* The paper cover round this book reproduces one of these official posters.

sometimes frankly suggested. As it is in other directions, the cumulative effect of this pictorial suggestion is probably strong; but it is only a single indication of a general policy, vigorously pursued.

Military training in some form is encouraged for everyone. In the Komsomol it is obligatory. Girls as well as boys are exhorted to learn to shoot. The Osoaviakhim, a semi-official organisation with nine million "members", was founded to further preparations for aerial and chemical warfare. It raises a large income by the only nominally voluntary methods usual in Russia. On special occasions the authorities call for subscriptions to pay for particular items of armament. "Our reply to Chamberlain," for instance, consisted of a fleet of tanks. There have since been other collections of the kind, devoted to airships and other war-material. The result of all this and of much else of the same sort, is an atmosphere of crude militarism which can hardly have a parallel in modern history.

The idea of violence, at home or abroad, fits in well enough with the general Bolshevik outlook. With their thorough-going materialism, force becomes not only a natural thing, but an admirable one. There is the internal "Class War", of which the Bolshevik attitude towards the outside world is a kind of extension. There is a

perpetual harping, in the Press and elsewhere, on the necessity for more and more armament against Capitalist aggression. Even the Plan has been constantly pictured as a battle. To the foreigner, all this sound and fury at first seems quite unreal. To him, the Soviets' "class-enemies" are in the main quite harmless individuals, or at the worst, individuals without the power for harm, sacrificed to encourage the rest. The Plan appears to him as a scheme for rapid industrial development, and not as something warlike. He knows that an armed invasion of Russia by the Capitalist Powers is a fantastic conception, and he realises, incidentally, that Russia is most unlikely to attack anyone else until her material resources are further developed. But, in the long run, he comes to see that all this cannot be dismissed as absurdity.

Communist propaganda has had a demonstrably powerful effect on the Russians; and among other things they have been taught for fifteen years to regard the outside world with hatred and contempt. This, unhappily, is one of the easiest of all lessons both to teach and to learn, and when the post-Revolutionary generation which has been soaked in it comes to take full control, the menace to world peace will become a very real one. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the professed aim of Communism has been,

and is, to break down all other forms of civilisation and to set up its own in their place. By now, it has become evident, even to the Russians, that neither the propaganda-work of the Third International, nor a commercial offensive, are likely to achieve quick results in this direction.

But there always remains to them the alternative of an attempt by means of armed force; and this the younger generation has been taught to regard as a natural and inevitable thing. It is always possible that in course of time internal difficulties may become such as to lead to an acute domestic crisis. For a Government to distract its people's attention from the state of affairs at home by adventures abroad, is a device as old as history, and there is no reason why a Russian Government should not resort to it as so many other Governments have done in the past. If internal dissension had led to a Military Dictatorship in some form or other, the thing would not be impossible, but even probable.

But whatever may or may not happen ultimately, it seems reasonably certain that Russia will not willingly embark on a policy of aggression until her industrial situation is much further consolidated, a process which must take at least another five years.

The Communists never tire of denouncing Capitalist Imperialism, and contrasting it with

their own Internationalism. And it is perfectly true that they do not aim at territorial expansion in a literal sense. An attack by the Soviets on one of their neighbours, would not have as its direct object to seize territory and incorporate it in Russia; but to set up in it a Communist Government which presumably would be expected to apply for admission to the Soviet Federation at once. The Bolsheviks are Internationalists in the sense that they seek to alloy themselves with the Proletariates of all countries alike against their Bourgeois governments. But the distinction between war against a people and war against that people's Government, has always been an extremely fine one, and for practical purposes, there is no great difference between Russia's old Pan-Slavism and her new Pan-Proletarianism.

It may be objected that Russia's official international policy is not aggressive but pacific; that it was she who, three years ago, proposed at Geneva a scheme for complete Disarmament; that she signed the Kellogg Pact; and that she has since concluded as many pacts of Non-aggression Treaties as she can. This is quite true. In fact, the Soviets' recent "peace" record, on paper, compares not unfavourably with that of anyone else, and it seems likely that for the next few years they will remain genuinely anxious

for peace at any price. The explanation is not difficult. Until their industrialisation is further advanced, the Soviets are impotent from a military point of view and they are naturally anxious for a period of the maximum security obtainable, till their deficiencies are made good.

Again, it might be objected that since her military ventures have so often failed, Russia is unlikely to wish to try new ones; and that in any case she is not a particularly formidable enemy. But as to this last point, it may well be that the Russia of, say, 1940, will be something very different from the Russia of 1905 or 1914. She will still have the factor of almost unlimited man-power in her favour. As for efficiency, strict discipline has already been restored in the Armies. Their main weakness at present is a lack of adequately trained officers, but it is not impossible that this will be remedied in course of time. The present Plan, with the Plans which are to follow it, will ensure a supply of armament and munitions, even if they succeed in doing nothing much else.

But to discuss the Soviets' ability or inability to win a major war is really beside the point. Their main objective would be less to defeat some great European group in the field, than by their intervention to bring about or prolong a war among the Capitalists themselves. It

is very evident that the strain and impoverishment following another war in Europe, which the Communists would exploit by fomenting disturbances in the combatants' rear, would bring world-revolution a long step nearer, and the Bolshevik who looks out on the Europe of 1933, might reasonably reckon that when the time comes, his opportunity will not be lacking. At the present moment, for instance, he would not be far wrong in judging that if on some pretext half-a-dozen Red Army Corps were to march into Bessarabia, the results might be catastrophic.

Poland could not afford to see Rumania crushed and herself outflanked. The Little Entente, as a whole, could hardly keep out of it, and France would have to show a strong interest. Half Europe, in fact, would be involved, more or less actively, in twenty-four hours, and in the next twenty-four hours the rest would take a hand. Poland in difficulties would inevitably remind Germany of her Eastern frontier. Hungary would think of her grievances against Rumania. Italy would mistrust France's intentions. In every industrial area in Europe, Communists would be doing their best to play havoc. It is impossible to guess what might be the outcome of it all, but it would inevitably be disastrous. Europe, if she will return to some greater degree of sanity,

still has ample time to avert the risk of any such calamity. But, unhappily, she shows small disposition to do so at present.

For us, the main question is, "What ought we to do?" A concise answer is hard to give, but one thing, at least, seems certain, and that is that it would pay us well to take the trouble to learn more of the truth about Russia. Admittedly, this is easier said than done. Accurate information is hard to come by and hard to judge without prejudice. But it is to our interest to try to do both so far as may be. At present there seem to be two schools of active opinion on Russia in this country, both of them influenced, in opposite directions, by sentiment rather than by facts.

One of them sees in Russia a passable representation of Hell; and so, indeed it is for some unfortunates. But these are a small minority in the vast population of the Union. The word "Hell" suggests something with an element of the dramatic; but what the great majority of Soviet citizens suffer from is a sordid and shabby discomfort. This school of thought, moreover, is apt to make practical mistakes. The Communist attitude towards Religion, for instance, naturally inspires anger and a wish to do something to help those who suffer under it. But the difficulty is that the most sincere efforts to assist or to protest were liable to make matters

worse, not better. The Communists preach that the churches are used by Capitalism as a means to assist the exploitation of the proletariat, and every meeting of protest or service of intercession held outside Russia was grist to their mill. They made a propaganda "feature" of it, as another instance of the intention of Bourgeois Europe to intervene against the "Workers' Republic", and another proof of the close ties between the Orthodox Church and Capitalism generally, and thus a further justification for their policy of repression.

Again, many people regard the Soviet labour system as amounting to one of slavery. Lord Snowden put this view concisely when he said that the reasons for the absence of unemployment in Russia, and in Dartmoor Prison, were the same. There are cases of what might fairly be called "slave-labour", but these are not representative of labour conditions in general. One of the outstanding causes for the non-success of the Plan, in fact, has been the "Fluidity" of labour, which has persisted in spite of the most drastic measures to counteract it. Production has been disorganised by the fact that masses of workmen drift continually from one factory to another in search of better conditions, which they do not find. This state of things, the existence of which is not open to question, can hardly be

reconciled with any general prevalence of “slave-labour” in the ordinary sense of the words. “Conscription” of labour there certainly is, but that is rather a different matter.

If a break in our commercial and diplomatic relations with Russia, in protest against the Soviet labour policy, or against their Debt-Repudiation, would make any practical difference in these directions, the step might well be justified. But it is in the highest degree unlikely that it would do anything of the sort. A total loss of our market would unquestionably add to the Soviets’ economic difficulties. As things are, indeed, it would quite likely involve the abandonment of the second Plan, in anything like its actual form. But it would not induce the Bolsheviks to change their methods. The practical result would be that the Russian public would feel the pinch more sharply than ever; and that there would be not less “slave-labour” but more of it.

Another school of thought on Russia goes to an extreme in the opposite sense. It supposes that the Soviet Union really *is* a “Workers’ Republic”, a country of progress and social justice, from which we have much to learn. At one time a considerable section of the Labour Party appeared to take this view. But, perhaps as a result of more experience of our own Communist Party, this tendency nowadays seems to

be less marked. Economically, Labour originally made the mistake of over-estimating the possibilities of trade with Russia following a resumption of diplomatic relations. Then, as now, Communist policy was one of extreme Economic Nationalism. In their attempt to make themselves independent of the outside world, the Soviets have carried the Protectionist idea further than it has ever been carried in the Capitalist world.

Only if what is really the fundamental aim of the Plan is abandoned, will Russia offer to us the great export market which her size and her population suggest. It is, indeed, possible that such a change may take place, sooner or later, but it has not happened yet and there are no indications that it will do so in the near future. Politically there seemed to be a disposition, at least at first, on the part of Labour in this country to regard the Soviet Government as a political comrade. If there really was any such sentiment, it was comically misplaced. The Bolsheviks outlook and method has less than nothing in common with that of our own Trade Unionism.

When the last Labour Government was in office, it was often curious and sometimes painful to compare the *Times* and the *Isvestya* of the same date. The *Times* would report Labour speeches in the House of Commons defending Russia in general and particularly our relations with her.

The *Izvestya*, on the other hand, would roundly abuse His Majesty's Government as a crew of "Social-Fascists" (whatever that may mean), "Flunkeys of Capitalism", and so on. Labour now, presumably, realises clearly that the Bolsheviks scorn them as contemptible compromisers and traitors to the proletariat, but they do not seem yet to have grasped clearly that the New Militarism of Russia is the very antithesis of their own pacific internationalism and all too likely to threaten the peace and stability which is essential to the international co-operation for which they stand. The limit of farce is reached when Extremists in this country organise protests against the despatch of munitions to the Far East, quoting as their authority Soviet Russia, a country which is straining every nerve to develop its Army, and its Air Force, and particularly its strength in long-range bombing machines.

Another group which accepts at their face value the Soviets' propagandist accounts of themselves, is drawn from the great army of the half-baked, who take as their device "*Omne Ignotum . . .*" and who are always ready to express, and even to feel, admiration for anything provided only that they think it is new and that they do not understand it very well. This attitude of mind is as old as the hills. Reports of the progress of the Great Pyramid were doubtless talked of in

Sumeria with the same awe as the Plan is sometimes discussed in Bloomsbury, and, as a matter of fact, the two things have something in common in that they were both on a scale calling for the conscription of a whole people. The idea of industrial conscription is anything but new.

Lastly, we have in this country the genuine Revolutionaries, whose dominant idea is the Class War, and with them a number of somewhat half-hearted and undecided allies. The former take all instructions from Moscow, and reckon quite rightly that Soviet Russia can be relied on to give them all the help that she can. The British Communist Party is still numerically insignificant. A Party which could only scrape up about seventy thousand votes out of a total of twenty-one million odd, cast at a general election following two years of acute industrial depression and unemployment, is clearly no great force in point of numbers.

But their numbers are growing, and will continue to grow so long as the depression persists, and in the meanwhile, they display an energy in disproportion to their numerical strength. Their aim is to stir up as much industrial strife as they can, and one wonders how many of those who hear their exhortations to strike, realise clearly that Moscow, which dictates the plan of campaign,

is always glad to see strikes defeated with as much loss and humiliation as may be. The Third International looks forward to Revolution and, logically enough, it seeks to foster for this purpose "class-consciousness" and the spirit of discontent. The last thing it wants to see is a working-class economically satisfied and stable. Quite recently, on the proposition of the Komintern, the Independent Labour Party has agreed to join with the British Communist Party in a "United Front" against Capitalism, Imperialism, Fascism, War, and some other things. Such an alliance perhaps is not likely to be permanent. But, in the meanwhile, one wonders again whether the I.L.P. has looked up the story of their opposite numbers, the Mensheviks, under the Soviets.

Between those who admire and those who detest Soviet Russia, lies the great mass of public opinion in England which is not greatly concerned one way or another, but would prefer to leave Russia to carry on her own affairs in her own way, unless and until they interfere seriously with our own. This, it seems to me, is a reasonable attitude to take up, and in any event it is the one which a Constitutional Government in this country must in practice adopt, since no other would in the long run command the general support of public opinion as a whole.

But this is not to say that we should take up an attitude of lofty indifference, while the propagandists busily carry on their work. It would be a mistake not to give the Soviets credit for such successes as they may have, as well as blame for their failures. Not to do so would, in the end, only convince uninformed public opinion here that the truth was being suppressed, from ulterior motives. But it is even more important to try to see that the picture which the Soviets and their friends in this country, paid and otherwise, paint of themselves, is not accepted as an authentic likeness.

It is a very good thing that more and more first-hand information on Russian conditions is slowly becoming available here. Every year, till now, has increased the total of English people who have gone to see for themselves. An impression exists that it is a waste of time to do this, as the authorities only show the visitor what they want him to see. But this is really hardly a fair statement. On the one hand, there have always been dark places in Russia to which no foreigner penetrates, and at the present moment, apparently, the agricultural situation is so bad that even Press correspondents are hardly allowed out of Moscow. On the other, there are some show institutions in Moscow and Leningrad, prisons, reformatories, crêches, and the like, of which the

authorities, as inveterate propagandists, naturally try to make the most. The visitor has only his or her own naïveté to blame for imagining these latter to be typical of Russia as a whole. Of course they are not, and, to do them justice, the authorities hardly care to suggest that they are. But, for the rest, it has hitherto been less official restrictions than the language difficulty, and the uncertainties and discomforts of Soviet travel itself, which have made long tours a considerable undertaking for the average foreigner.

Unfortunately, not every English visitor who spends a few days in Moscow seems able to preserve his or her normal balance in expressing opinions when they return. There have been some glaring instances in the last two years, or so. It was, perhaps, to be expected that Mr. Bernard Shaw, after a stay of nearly a fortnight in Russia, should on his return deliver himself first of a few paradoxes which somehow gave the impression of having been carefully polished up before he went, and then express his final approval of Stalin's régime, with all the self-conscious irresponsibility which is his stock-in-trade. But it was another thing when he publicly gave his assent to the G.P.U.'s. preposterous "frame-up" against the employés of Metropolitan-Vickers. Mr. Shaw's facetiousness has long since become a bore. In this case, it was stupidly mischievous.

More unexpected was a statement rightly or wrongly attributed by the papers to Mrs. Sidney Webb. She was reported to have found that young Russian women were "too well-dressed for revolutionists". I cannot claim to be a judge of these things, but I do know that if Mrs. Webb had heard what the Russian girl really thinks of Soviet clothes, stockings, shoes, and so on, she would have got what Americans call "an ear-full". Perhaps Mrs. Webb has not read the Soviet novel translated into English under the title *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings*.

If this sort of thing is not uncommon from those who have been to see Russia for themselves, even though it be for a short time, it is perhaps small wonder that "bunk" on the subject is so prevalent in this country. There have been too many cases of it to quote, but in any event, it is to be hoped that time will tend to diminish them.

In the meanwhile, we are faced with the problem of our future political and commercial relations with Russia. First, comes the question of whether it is better to maintain, or to break off, diplomatic relations with the Soviets. The truth is, I believe, that it does not make any great practical difference which we decide to do. It has become obvious by now that the establishment of the friendly relationship usual between

one State and another in normal times is an impossibility as between this country and Russia, and that through no fault of ours. I have the best of reasons for knowing that since 1929 we have sincerely and consistently done our best, by diplomatic means, to bring about at least a feeling of ordinary confidence. But the Kremlin thanked us for our efforts by launching the monstrous Vickers prosecution. Again, it is evident by now that the maintenance of diplomatic relations brings no particular trade advantage. To maintain an Embassy at Moscow may have done no harm; but it has demonstrably done no good, politically or commercially, and since it is an expensive business, there seems no very good reason for asking the taxpayer to continue to foot the bill.

Next, comes the question of the Komintern's propaganda, and its subsidies to subversive organisations in this country and elsewhere in the Empire. It should be remembered in this connection that when Lenin launched the October Revolution, he believed that a general "proletarian" upheaval was imminent, and for a long time the Communists attached great importance to their propaganda as a means of bringing this about quickly. Broadly speaking, their main effort was originally directed against the West; they then turned to the East, notably to China,

where indeed they have had a very considerable measure of success; of late years they have turned back towards the West again. But this is not to say that they have ever devoted their efforts to one part of the world to the exclusion of the rest.

Propaganda, in one form or another, has been carried on continuously, and everywhere, its form being varied to suit the mentality of the peoples concerned. In primitive countries the Communist tactics is to support nationalist movements; in advanced States their line is to foment industrial unrest, and so on. This is all too well-known to need further comment. As to the present position, the foreigner has the impression that the main stream of Communist opinion in Russia has to some extent lost faith, or at any rate lost interest, in the world-propaganda campaign. The Third International seems no longer to enjoy its old prestige. Russian attention is focussed on the Plan, and all the economic questions connecting it with the outside world are looked at rather from a military than a propagandist standpoint. In any case, there is a marked shortage of cash, and expenditure on such items as the Propaganda Universities and on subsidies to subversive movements abroad, are believed to have been pretty drastically cut down.

Our traditional policy with extremist move-

ments of every kind has been the "Open Drain" system. We allow them a great deal of rope, provided they keep within certain wide legal bounds. There seems no particular reason why we should change our system in the case of Communism, in its foreign or its domestic aspect. But we must apply the system with a reasonable degree of effectiveness. If existing legal restrictions are seen to be inadequate, they must be tightened up. The Soviets are frankly aggressive in their dealings with us, and there is less than nothing to be gained by adopting an attitude of conciliation at all costs towards them.

The relations between Russia and Italy are a good example of a common-sense policy at work. The Facists do not allow Communist propaganda to inconvenience them. Nevertheless, Russo-Italian political and economic relations are, perhaps, more undisturbed and stable than those between Russia and any other country. If Communist subsidies or propaganda from Moscow become a serious menace to this country, or to the Empire, the remedy is in our own hands. It is sheer waste of time to beg the Soviet Government to be good enough to use their influence to put an end to it. They have not the remotest intention, or indeed the power, to do anything of the kind. But we could put an end to most of it for ourselves.

But the most important question is that of our future Trade Relationship with Russia. As I have mentioned already, it is often loosely asserted that because Russia is a vast country, she must therefore offer a vast potential market to the rest of the world. As a general statement, this may or may not prove true in a distant future. But it is not true now, and it will not be true until the present economic policy of the Soviets is abandoned. Russia, after all, had a very large population before the War, but her foreign trade was relatively inconsiderable, and it has remained so ever since. The Russian masses have almost no purchasing power, and they would not be allowed to use it abroad, even if they had it, so long as the Bolsheviks maintain their ideal of economic self-sufficiency. To suppose that Russia is a vast market only awaiting exploitation is pure illusion.

But the Bolsheviks' policy of industrialisation means that Russia must, while the existing ideas last, go on buying from abroad the machinery which she cannot make, or replace, for herself. Such purchases do at present amount to an appreciable percentage of the world's trade. But it is a total which must, apparently, grow progressively less, whatever happens. The more success the Bolsheviks can achieve, the greater will be their self-sufficiency and the less their dependence

on the outside world. If, on the other hand, the failure of the Plan becomes more pronounced, the indirect result must be that the Soviets will be able to spend abroad only decreasing amounts. Even complete collapse, or a complete reversal of policy, involving the abandonment of industrialisation and the throwing open of the Russian market to "consumers'" goods from outside, would not have the effect which one might, at first glance expect. The purchasing power of the Russians has, by now, been depressed so far that generations would have to pass before they could buy enough as individuals to have any important effect on the world's markets.

In considering the future of Anglo-Russian trade, therefore, the first thing is to realise that, at the best, our export to Russia can only reach relatively modest figures, indeed, almost unimportant ones in comparison with those of our trade with the Empire and some other foreign States. As to Russian exports, these, of course, divide themselves into manufactured, and primary, products. With regard to the former, it becomes increasingly hard to be impressed with the possibility of Soviet Industry as a leading factor in the world's economy. The foreigner gains the impression that its inefficiency is such that not for many years, if ever, will it be able to compete on level, or anything like level, terms with

Western production, except in markets where there is a large demand for the cheapest goods procurable, regardless of quality or rather the lack of it.

It is true that the Bolshevik system of "forced" exports does make it possible for them to under-sell any competitor whatsoever, for a given time, in a given market. But this is not a permanent state of things. The Soviets cannot under-sell in all of the markets, all of the time, without depressing their internal standard of living to a point which even the Russians could not tolerate indefinitely. But the position with regard to certain primary products is different. Fir-trees will grow in the North, whatever may happen in Moscow; no particular efficiency is needed to get Russian oil as far as the tankers at Black Sea ports; such commodities as platinum, manganese, asbestos, and furs generally command a market somewhere. The Soviets have a surplus of these things which they can export to set against their purchases of machinery.

Our own position is that we have always been vitally interested in our export trade, and more so than ever at this moment, seeing that unemployment falls particularly severely on our exporting industries. This country and Russia, in fact, for very different reasons, are both deeply concerned with the same thing; the maintenance of

exports. If so, there is only one solution which can fairly meet, so far as is possible, the requirements of both sides, and that is a balanced trade between them. But this, unfortunately, is a principle that we have hitherto failed to induce the Soviets to accept. We have tried diplomatic persuasion, formal negotiation and inducements in the shape of State-guaranteed Credits. But whereas over the Plan period we have taken not far short of a quarter of all Soviet exports, less than a fifteenth part of their foreign purchases have been made from us. The ratio of exports has been about 135 : 35 against us.

The bigoted Free Trader might try to maintain that there was nothing unsatisfactory in this position. He might refer to the many-sidedness of world trade; to the advantages to the consumer, and so to the country, of imports at bankrupt prices, and all the rest of it. But such arguments would have nothing to do with realities. What has happened is that the Bolsheviks have unloaded quantities of agricultural, and some other, products on this country, most of which were needed very urgently by the Russians themselves. With the proceeds they bought machinery, first from the United States because they were obsessed with the idea that America was the only Capitalist State large enough and modern enough to be worthy of their notice; while latterly, having

developed doubts as to their early enthusiasms for everything American, they have turned to Germany, which has offered them exceptional credit terms.

But the whole process has done little or nothing to stimulate world trade. Most of our good sterling payments trickled through Russian fingers to the United States, where they have crystallised into bars of gold which lie to this day in the vaults of American banks, sterile and useless. Moreover, we have lost by it more directly. The low price of Russian agricultural products may for the time being have suited the Wholesale Co-operative Society well enough, but it has made matters still harder for the already struggling British agricultural community. Worse than all, the flood of cheap Russian imports has reduced, *pro tanto*, our power to purchase from the Empire and from those foreign States which can be persuaded to offer us a more profitable exchange of trade than Russia has yet shown signs of doing.

But, at long last, we ourselves have taken the powers which the Soviets have exercised from the first. How we should use them seems to me obvious now, and always has done so since first I went to Russia. In the first place, we should carefully make up our minds as to what quantities of each Russian product we can purchase without

a direct or indirect disadvantage to ourselves. The sum total of these quotas might not amount to a very impressive figure, but it should not be a negligible one. Next, we should inform the Soviets of our readiness to buy from them up to the amounts on which we have decided, but only on the condition that they bought from us manufactured goods to a corresponding total value. To such a proposal the Bolsheviks would doubtless begin by replying with a threat to cease importing from this country. They have made this threat several times already, and what is more, they would have little difficulty in carrying it out. But what they are careful not to tell their own people is that while they can always divert orders from this country elsewhere, they have no hope at all of finding a market comparable to ours to sell in. This is the vital point to them, and it means that we shall always have the last word so long as Russia pursues her present policy of industrialisation.

In short, I believe that we could and must revert to what amounts to a system of barter. The machinery by which it could be worked might not be too easy to devise, but the difficulties would by no means be insuperable. The point is that some such arrangement is the only one which meets, fairly and reasonably, the requirements of both countries so far as they

can be met. The only acceptable alternative, from our point of view, would be to put a stop to Anglo-Russian trade altogether. There would be objections to this, but at least it would have the merit of adding to our power to make more profitable bargains elsewhere.

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